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Making Moral Worlds: Individual and Social Processes of Meaning Making in a Somali  
Diaspora

by

Anna Lisa Jacobsen

A dissertation presented to the  
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences  
of Washington University  
in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy

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Saint Louis, Missouri

## Abstract:

I argue that most Somalis living in exile in the Eastleigh neighborhood of Nairobi, Kenya are deeply concerned with morality both as individually performed and proven, and as socially defined, authorized and constructed. In this dissertation, I explore various aspects of Somali morality as it is constructed, debated, and reinforced by individual women living in Eastleigh. I examine a variety of ways in which Somali women in Eastleigh identify morality and ethical behavior. I argue that this metaethical project is not an artifact of analysis, but is a useful way of capturing how Somalis in Kenya and elsewhere are undertaking a dialogue and exploration of what constitutes “the moral.” The contours of such projects vary depending on local context, and I endeavor to look carefully at how this unfolds in one specific place, at one specific time. Yet I argue that some of the *processes* of metaethical reflection I describe here, and how they related to people’s sense of Somali identity in diaspora, are active in other contexts as well.

As I will show throughout this dissertation, this metaethical project designed to define the good and bad serves not only social ends, but individual, spiritual and psychological ones as well. This process has not created a univocal narrative or definition of the moral. Identifying the moral takes place within tensions between the clan structures, which organized social and moral worlds, and some nascent or even purely imagined social orders. It also emerges amidst and within the tensions among diverse ways of understandings Islamic commands and ethics, and within debates about mental and spiritual health. The metaethical project undertaken by Somalis in Eastleigh is one of multiple moralities and is therefore multivocal and contextually varied, even while it is the case that most of the people with whom I spoke saw themselves as engaged in such a project. Here I wish to highlight that the project of cultivating moral personhood extends both deeply within individual persons as well as extending far beyond them.

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There are many people deserving of my deepest gratitude for their support, assistance, guidance, love, mentorship and friendship. Without them, I can honestly say I would not have been able to do this. Here I would like to name a few. To my family, particularly Petra and Peter Lenzini, and Joel Jacobsen, you have been my foundation. From late nights helping me enter bibliographic data into Endnote and into my manuscript, to wonderful family-fun-nights where we sat on the back porch and laughed, I am indebted to you and I love you so much. Mom and Dad, thank you for your love, encouragement and for believing in me.

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Abraham Woolsey Lenzini, you are the future.  
You can do anything you put your mind to, and in that vein I dedicate this to you.

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# 1. Introduction

## On Morality, Moral Creativity, and Moral Crisis

### Introduction

“Do you see that cooking stove over there?” Hamdi asked me. I dutifully looked at the cooking stove and nodded using every ounce of willpower I could muster not to roll my eyes. I struggled because this question introduced the message of nearly every lesson I was taught and my reactions wavered from finding the question tiresome to finding it hilarious. During my dissertation fieldwork among Somali refugee women living in the Eastleigh neighborhood of Nairobi, Kenya, I spent countless hours listening to different people tell me that I had done something wrong. This particular lesson would be about nail polish.

I was interviewing an elderly woman about her new political poetry with an audience of a dozen of her close friends and family. As usual, I was wearing a *buibui*<sup>1</sup> and, as I had learned to do early in my research, I tucked my feet under the hem of the gown when I sat. In the middle of listening to her talk about the moment she first realized that Allah had given her the gift of poetry, I shifted my weight slightly on the bed and my bare right big toe poked out from under the robe revealing bright purple toenail polish. It did not go unnoticed. Rodo, a 22 year-old Aqwaani<sup>2</sup> woman’s eyes bulged and she

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<sup>1</sup> A buibui is the long, thin, black robe women wear over their clothing in many parts of the Muslim world. It is thinner than the jilbaabs and burqas, which are also commonly worn.

<sup>2</sup> Aqwaani is the term Somalis use to refer to people who follow the Wahhabbi, or Salafi path of Sunni Islam. Although this Somali word sounds quite similar to the Ikhwan, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, they are not the same in Somali society. I go into more detail about how these and other terms are used to

whirled around to whisper something in the ear of her friend, Asha. Asha found and fixated on the offending digit. In spite of my attempts to subtly re-conceal my naked toe and its painted nail, Asha loudly interrupted the old poet to ask her auntie, a large woman in her mid-40s, who was sitting across the room, “Auntie, do you remember that story of the girl who painted her toenails and then suddenly died?” With hardly a moment’s pause the women in the room nodded and proceeded to collectively construct the story of the young, worldly woman who, because her toenail polish would not come off as they prepared her dead body, could not be buried in a Muslim cemetery and consequently she went to hell, which brings me back to where I started:

Do you see that cooking stove over there? Do you see the hot coals burning there? Would you want to live in there for all eternity? Because that is what hell is like – only hotter.

My purple nail polish was added to the list of ways I would find myself in hell if I did not amend my ways. I want to be very clear, however, that these women respected me and were genuinely concerned for my well-being. They would criticize each other in much the same way they criticized me. My behavior<sup>3</sup>, like everyone else’s, was under constant scrutiny and regulation as these women attempted to help me become a better person. I was praised when I showed signs of improvement (such as the first day I wore the buibui) and rebuked when I failed (such as in the situation described above).

I believe that, like these women, most Somalis living in exile in Eastleigh are deeply concerned with morality both as individually performed and proven, and as socially defined, authorized and constructed. In this dissertation, I will explore various

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by Somalis to describe individuals who participate in specific forms of devotional practice in Chapters 2 and 4.

<sup>3</sup> That said, of course, a few people I met with, including my research assistants, confessed that in many ways my behavior was under even higher levels of scrutiny because I represented so many potentially polluted and immoral categories and ideologies.



aspects of Somali morality as it is constructed, debated, and reinforced by individual women living in Eastleigh<sup>4</sup>. Here I examine a variety of ways in which Somali women in Eastleigh identify morality and ethical behavior. When Somalis debate about what constitutes ethical behavior, whether painting one's toes with nail polish or carrying out a particular religious practice, I wish to understand why these acts have been defined in moral terms. Often the acts themselves seem less important than what these acts say about the persons who are doing them; the acts, through the debate about them and the symbolic significance attached to them, ultimately seem to index a certain moral personhood of the actors.

As I will show throughout this dissertation, this metaethical project designed to define the good and bad serves not only social ends, but individual, spiritual and psychological ones as well. This process has not created a univocal narrative or definition of the moral. Identifying the moral takes place within tensions between the clan structures, which organized social and moral worlds, and some nascent or even purely imagined social orders. It also emerges amidst and within the tensions among diverse ways of understandings Islamic commands and ethics. The metaethical project undertaken by Somalis in Eastleigh is one of multiple moralities and is therefore multivocal and contextually varied, even while it is the case that most of the people with whom I spoke saw themselves as engaged in such a project.

I argue that this constant, generative, moral regulation<sup>5</sup> occurs within the Somali community in diaspora in response to the violence, displacement, and general feelings of

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<sup>4</sup> Although men's voices and stories will figure into my discussion, for various logistical and strategic reasons discussed below I focus my attention on women's experiences.

<sup>5</sup> I want to stress here, however, that while I use the term moral "regulation," I am not suggesting that it is simply or only a top-down form of regulation. While social institutions such as Islam and the State are

insecurity that many Somalis have experienced since the State's collapse in 1991 and the ensuing civil war. Further, although the Somali civil war officially began in 1991, insecurity has done little but escalate since. While the fighting initially occurred largely along reified and heavily politicized clan lines, it continues today under the banners of saving Somalia (nation, culture, religion and people) from "predatory" Ethiopians, ousting a transitional government seen as corrupt and as a puppet for US and Ethiopian agendas, ridding Somalia of a group of immoral, greedy men who do not have faith but who are mired in a primeval cultural tradition of clannism, and establishing peace by implementing sharia law. Although much of the violence remains confined within the Somali national borders, Somalis living in exile around the world are still very much affected by it.

In addition to the large-scale breakdown of social life that has resulted from the civil war, many individuals have had to manage various personal moral crises in this process. People I spoke with experienced and witnessed acts of violence by those whom they formerly called neighbors. They also have had to cope with the reification and militarization of clan lines, where clan affiliation previously had been a source of pride, celebration, and alliances. Women are finding themselves increasingly responsible for the well-being of their families as men die or disappear. In exile in Kenya, men and women alike are struggling to find employment and have had to rely on the generosity of often very distant family members. Somalis living illegally in Eastleigh also must contend with the constant threat of police raids and deportation or being sent back to the refugee camps, where living conditions are appalling.

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involved in regulating individuals, it is individuals themselves who are enforcing moral norms and ethical behavior in themselves and each other in daily, more mundane ways as well.

Within the context of social upheaval, ongoing civil war, massive social change, and a general state of socio-economic, socio-political and personal insecurity and anxiety, Somalis are struggling with the question of what it means to be a moral person. Based on what I have learned and observed from my 21 months in Eastleigh, they are actively working to locate morality in their own lives and in the lives of people around them. Part of their work concerns the discursive and physical construction of Eastleigh as a moral place; another concerns the acknowledgement of the various Somali communities throughout the diaspora. Somalis living in Eastleigh place Eastleigh at the Somali world's moral center. I discuss this geo-spatial figuring of morality in more detail in Chapter 3. Here I merely wish to highlight that the project of cultivating moral personhood extends both deeply within individual persons as well as extending far beyond them.

### **On Morality, Moral breakdowns, Moral creativity and Ethical Selves**

There are long debates within the fields of philosophy and anthropology about what constitutes morality and ethics. Ethics has broadly referred to the philosophical study of morality, the subject matter of the study, and the moral principles of a particular tradition, group, or individual. While I will go into more detail later in this chapter outlining some of the seminal studies of morality upon which I draw in this dissertation, I first want to briefly reference some of the ways morality and ethics have been defined and discussed.

The word ethics has its origins in the Greek word *ethos*, meaning the way of life or custom and habit, while morality comes from the word *mos*, which is the Latin translation of *ethos* (Zigon 2008). Anthropology has for much of its disciplinary history

drawn on Durkheim for his use of the words morality and ethics, as socially (religiously) determined norms of behavior (Benedict 1956; Firth 1951). For Durkheim, morality consists of three essential elements: discipline, attachment to society and autonomy (Durkheim 1961[1925]). Max Weber understood morality as the link between the two aspects of what he terms a rationalized society, namely fact and value (1990[1930]). Others have spent their time looking at morality in terms obligations or duties expected of members of a society (c.f. Edel and Edel 2000[1959]).

Virtue ethicists, starting with Aristotle, have taken morality to be the act of “behaving in the mean” (Zigon 2008:25), meaning that determining whether an individual is acting virtuously can only be analyzed in specific situations, where one asks whether he or she chooses to live neither decadently (i.e. over-indulging) nor in ways that detrimentally deprive him or her. Taking up Aristotle’s notion of the good<sup>6</sup>, Alisdair MacIntyre focuses on ways individuals can achieve their own particular good within the context of their own lives (MacIntyre 1998 [1966], cited in Zigon 2008:25).

Several scholars have recently separated the moral codes of obligation from the ethical practices chosen by individuals (c.f. Laidlaw 1995). Michel Foucault (2000), distinguishes between ethics and morality by referring to morality as the code or rules that social institutions impose on their members and ethics as the way individuals work on themselves to become socially acceptable members of society, which is done by means of what he calls “technologies of the self.” Most recently, Jarett Zigon (2007; 2008; 2009) has forwarded a distinction between morality and ethics that he believes will assist in providing analytical and methodological assistance for the future of the

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<sup>6</sup> For Aristotle and MacIntyre, the good is defined as “the goal, purpose, or aim to which something or somebody moves” (MacIntyre 1998 [1966]:57).

anthropology of moralities. He considers there to be three different, though related spheres of morality: (1) the institutional; (2) that of public discourse; (3) and the embodied dispositions. Ethics, on the other hand is the more conscious, self-reflexive awareness or “stepping away” from the embodied, naturalized ways of acting moral in which individuals must work on their moral way of being in the world. In this “ethical moment,” Zigon argues that all three spheres of morality come into play to inform what a person chooses to do. These ethical moments are, for Zigon, highly creative moments, for as an individual consciously makes a moral decision or in Zigon’s terms by “performing ethics,” individuals “create...new moral selves and enact new moral worlds” (Zigon 2008:165). When speaking of the Somali case in this study, I use “morality” to refer to Somali conceptions of goodness, propriety, and obligation, which are constructed both by social institutions as well as by individuals. Individuals establish morality, through their ethical actions and behaviors.

In philosophical terms, I try to carry out here a metaethical exploration of Somali individual and social lives. In philosophy, metaethicists are interested less in normative ideas of what people ought or should do than in the underlying processes involved in defining what the good and the bad are for a group of people (Miller 2003). Such theorists are interested in questioning assertions of the universality of morality and ethical behavior, and in exploring the contextual, processual, and subjective projects undertaken when morality is debated. “Metaethics is not about what people ought to do. It is about what they are doing when they talk about what they ought to do” (Hudson 1970:1). As Smith writes, “In metaethics, we are concerned not with questions which are the province of normative ethics like ‘Should I give to famine relief?’ or ‘Should I return the wallet I

found in the street?’ but with questions about questions like these” (Smith 1994:2).

Metaethics is thus very close to anthropology in seeking to account for ways people situate themselves with respect to particular moral ideas.

I also argue that this metaethical project is not an artifact of analysis, but is a useful way of capturing how Somalis in Kenya and elsewhere are undertaking a dialogue and exploration of what constitutes “the moral.” The contours of such projects vary depending on local context, and I endeavor to look carefully at how this unfolds in one specific place, at one specific time. Yet I argue that some of the *processes* of metaethical reflection I describe here, and how they related to people’s sense of Somali identity in diaspora, are active in other contexts as well.

In the vignette with which I introduced this chapter, for example, we can observe not only the dialogic way these women labeled certain behaviors as moral or immoral, but also what they hoped to accomplish through the cooperative articulation of the story (and its lesson). The specifics of the lesson, and the manner in which it was communicated, were closely tied to the local context. For them, the habit of painting one’s nails was immoral because it indexed a desire to conform to certain Western conceptions of beauty and person at the expense of more modest ways of beautifying oneself such as by using henna, ways that were more in accord with Islam. This desire was seen as vain and individualistic. These women were less concerned about nail polish per se, but more about the loss of Somali and Muslim personhood and the dangers of being seduced by the ever-present evils of a non-Muslim and non-Somali lifestyle. These concerns were particularly acute in a transitional context in which resettlement to the West was a distinct possibility, and one that, on the evidence of people who had already

gone abroad, was likely to lead to a loss of culture and faith. I believe that individuals are engaged in such metaethical exercises not only in the midst of a transitional refugee community, but also in other contexts.

I find that this attention to ethics and morality by Somali women living in Kenya is a profoundly creative one. Following Wall (2007; 2005), and drawing on Ricoeur (1983/1984; 1975), I believe that morality is not just constructed rationally. It incorporates the body and mind as much as it does the social and religious worlds. It is also constructed poetically and ritually (Foucault 2000; Hirschkind 2001; Lambek 2000; Lester 2009; Parish 1994; Rappaport 1999; Ricoeur 1975, 1983; Robbins 2001, 2004; Throop 2008; Turner 1967; Wall 2005, 2007). Recognizing creativity in morality, I believe, gives weight to the myriad processes through which individuals make meaning of their lives.

Doing so is of particular importance in a context of war, violence, insecurity and displacement such as that which Somalis have experienced and witnessed since the beginning of the war in 1991. As Carolyn Nordstrom (1997, 2004) and others (c.f. Scarry 1985) have repeatedly pointed out, in the context of war, people become profoundly creative in not only rebuilding their communities and lives, but also in making meaning of their experiences. As Nordstrom argues in her ethnography of Mozambican warzones, “Survival, then, involves crafting a new universe of meaning and action” (1997:13).

### **Morality in Anthropology**

Until the mid-1990s, many anthropologists tended to subsume the moral in the social. In doing so they often drew on the work of Emile Durkheim. In direct opposition to the then-popular philosophical trends that privileged utilitarianism and Kantianism, Durkheim and his students insisted on recognizing and emphasizing the role of the social world as influential and suggestive for human action and behavior and key to building and understanding it. The social world was, for Durkheim, about maintaining solidarity (Durkheim 1995 [1912]); for him, society is based on moral obligations, and social facts are external to the individual and coercive, and they function to unite the society into a single moral community. Importantly, Durkheim insisted that these social facts were *specific* to particular societies and therefore *different* from one to another, but that social facts in general were a source of goodness. For him, then, social facts and the moral/religious worlds they created were a source of uncontested, even desired goodness.

We can acknowledge that morality is linked to social and cultural life and to particular ideologies. These linkages have given rise to a number of definitions of morality. For Ruth Benedict, for example, morality “is a convenient term for socially approved habits” (1956:195). Or as Raymond Firth argues,

Morality is a set of principles on which [judgments of right and wrong] are based. Looked at empirically from the sociological point of view, morality is socially specific in the first instance. Every society has its own moral rules about what kinds of conduct are right and what are wrong, and members of society conform to them or evade them, and pass judgment accordingly (Firth 1951:183)

Durkheim’s legacy has continued to be strong in anthropology. However, many anthropologists of morality recently have suggested that Durkheim’s approach may have led some analysts to overemphasize the connection between the social and moral. Indeed, they have charged that morality has been used as a synonym for culture, in that both



terms refer to the set of shared values and ideologies that underlie and inform *all* practices and behaviors. For these scholars, morality has come to define and describe everything and nothing (Heintz 2009:2; Laidlaw 2002:313; Robbins 2009:62; Zigon 2007). As Joel Robbins points out, “When every observance of a collectively held rule of etiquette is as much a moral act as is refraining from killing someone who has injured you, there seems to be little to say about morality beyond obvious nostrums about the force of culture in guiding behavior” (2009: 62-3). Consequently, many anthropologists have demanded that morality be studied anthropologically as its own category (c.f. Fassin 2008; Heintz 2009; Laidlaw 2002; Robbins 2007, 2009; Zigon 2007, 2008, 2009;) and in much of this literature there is a focus on those moments and circumstances when an individual makes choices between alternative possible actions (c.f. Howell 1997; Robbins 2007, 2009a, 2009b; Zigon 2007; 2008; 2009)<sup>7</sup>. They are interested in the specific practices that are organically deemed moral or immoral and the moments when individuals choose to behave ethically.

In his 2001 Malinowski Memorial lecture to the Royal Anthropological Institute, James Laidlaw (2002) argued that to move past any conflation of the social and the moral, anthropologists need to look at the role of freedom, recovering from Kant what Durkheim left out. “I want therefore to argue that an anthropology of ethics will only be possible – will only be prevented from constantly collapsing into general questions of social regularity and social control – if we take seriously, as something requiring ethnographic description, the possibilities of human freedom” (Laidlaw 2002:315). Rejecting a Durkheimian belief in moral determinism, and invoking simultaneously aspects of Nietzsche’s distinction between moral values and non-moral values and

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<sup>7</sup> These alternative possible actions can both be positive; they do not necessarily need to clash violently.

Foucault's discussion of self-fashioning, or "techniques of self," Laidlaw argues that only actions taken with reflective consciousness should be considered moral actions.

### *Freedom and Crisis*

Taking this position does not mean, however, that consciousness is pre-social or a-social. Joel Robbins (2004, 2007, 2009a, 2009b), for example, has added that we also need a theory of values to understand how an individual makes a moral/ethical decision in particular moments. A theory of value (Dumont 1977, 1980, 1986) and of how values operate in a society helps us create a model of freedom "that does not disregard the force of cultural norms and the routines they produce" (Robbins 2007:296). In other words, though he agrees that we need to move past Durkheimian understandings of socio-moral worlds, we should not discard them entirely (Robbins 2009). Interpreting Dumont's theory of values through the lens of Weber, Robbins insists that cultures are made up of a hierarchy of value-spheres, where some values are more socially and individually rationalized than others. Within contexts of massive cultural change or crisis, when there is no obvious hierarchy of these spheres, we can observe freedom more clearly (Robbins 2009: 65-70). "Harmony within and between spheres puts in place a Durkheimian morality of reproduction, where the rules are clear and the compulsion to follow them very strong. Conflict, by contrast, invites, indeed demands, the kinds of reflexive choice that Laidlaw associates with ethical freedom" (Robbins 2007:299). In other words, when a society is in transition or conflict, individuals consciously identify and choose to act according to potentially new moral codes.

To illustrate this, Robbins shows that since the community-wide conversion to Pentecostal Christianity, the Urapmin in Papua New Guinea have come to understand the world differently. Robbins believes that the moral tensions and crisis present among the Urapmin stem from the fact that there are two equally valuable, equally rationalized value spheres in competition and contradiction with one another: there is the value sphere of Christianity (emphasizing individualism) and the value sphere of the traditional Urapmin culture (emphasizing relationalism). In any given context, the individual must choose between patterns of behavior that carry specific, if contradictory and competing, moral legitimacy. Because of the tension between the two equally rationalized though not yet hierarchized value spheres created in the context of massive social change (conversion) the Urapmin are stalled in a heightened state of moral consciousness.

Like Robbins, Jarrett Zigon is interested in studying morality during times of change, or what he refers to as “breakdown.” For Zigon, there are three closely intertwined components of morality: institutions, public discourse, and embodied dispositions. Ethics for him is the conscious reflection on morality as embodied dispositions (2009: 82). The embodied dispositional aspects of morality are most often subconscious; individuals often behave in ways that are acceptable to society without consciously reflecting on their behavior. There are times, however, when someone must make a decision about how to behave in a socially and morally acceptable way. The ethical moment, which requires a person to consciously reflect on oneself and one’s moral way of being in the world, is thus brought about by a moral breakdown.

Zigon argues that only occasionally in everyday life does one stop and self-reflexively consider how to be moral. Drawing on Heidegger, Zigon argues that like a

man hammering a nail who does not truly consider the hammer until the moment it doesn't work properly, people are only aware of their moral worlds – specifically how to behave properly in them – when something goes wrong. It is at this moment of “moral breakdown,” or that moment when morality as embodied dispositions is called into question, that a person's “being-in-the-world” changes. This change requires a self-reflective and self-reflexive moment of moral questioning and decision-making, during which the goal is most profoundly to resolve the issue and return to the unreflective mode of everyday dispositions, even though this unreflective mode may be different than it was before the breakdown. Once one has experienced this moral breakdown, she works on herself by utilizing certain individually and culturally defined ethical tactics. “Thus this moment of ethics is a creative moment, for by performing ethics, new moral persons and new moral worlds are created, even if ever so slightly.... The ethical process is a moment in which multifarious aspects of the three spheres of morality I described above come together to inform the ways in which a person works on herself” (Zigon 2009: 82).

To illustrate this, he uses an example from his own research with women in post-Soviet Russia. He observes that a woman must consciously choose to lie because in office cultures there are spaces in which lying is actually a moral thing to do. While her Orthodox Christianity tells her that lying is unethical, in the world of the office it was actually morally responsible to lie about certain things. The moment of moral breakdown occurs because there is a moment in which an individual is given space, or freedom, to assess the situation and make a decision about what is morally sound behavior or not. It is a reflective process. Similar to what Foucault refers to as “problematization,” Zigon argues that the moment of breakdown creates a moment of relative freedom of thought;

when suddenly the structure is in question, there is no immediate habitualized course of action in place to guide the behavior and decision-making process by the individual, thereby creating a moment in which individuals must – creatively – choose a new course of action.

While I certainly agree that during times of moral breakdown, individuals almost necessarily reflect on and make decisions that involve the identification and even construction of the moral, I would have to disagree with Zigon's claim that individuals *only* reflect consciously on their sense of morality or their ethical obligations during moments of breakdown. As Carolyn Nordstrom argues (1997), although at times of crisis individuals and groups endure and make meaning in highly creative ways, creative meaning-making does not require violence or breakdown. Indeed, in my research I observed how people were constantly attentive to their ethical work, and in spite of this work occurring after what certainly could be called a massive moral breakdown in Somali society, there were many moment to moment ethical decisions that were made, not out of crisis, but out of pride and self-reflexive piety.

Furthermore, I think a useful distinction might be made between ethical action and moral breakdown, or perhaps a more nuanced attention brought to the layers and kinds of moral breakdown. Drawing on the nail polish story I used to introduce this chapter, for instance, the ethical debate and the rather didactic morality and moralizing that occurred in that conversation did not arise from a moral breakdown (my purple toe-nail polish certainly was not causing a crisis in this small room) but rather provided an opportunity for the women in the room to talk and teach me and each other about what was good and what was bad. It was a lesson about the proper treatment of the human

body, about the dangers of vanity<sup>8</sup>, and about the ultimate, very-real consequences of immorality, namely going to hell. It was a form of didactic morality, a teaching moment, in which through this story, each person present could also feel a reward in helping me find my path and thereby perform her own morality. By exploring the didactic component of morality, we can also explore the ways conversations like this become metaethical exercises in which subjects are made not just through the obeying but also through the construction and debate about what is good.

Certainly, Somalis in Eastleigh did and do experience moments of moral breakdown and crisis, but the Somali concern for morality and moral personhood is less about the actual moment of breakdown and more about the creative construction of morality. In ensuing chapters, I will draw on Zigon's notion that we can observe ethical decision-making during times of crisis and breakdown, but argue that we can also observe ethical decision-making as both creative and gracious, and not restricted to moments of crisis.

### *Virtue*

Aristotelian virtue ethics<sup>9</sup> has featured prominently in much of the ethnographic research about moral worlds in the last decade. Heavily influenced by Michel Foucault, this literature focuses on how individuals become virtuous persons and define virtuous personhood. In Aristotelian ethics, there is an understanding of the relationships among

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<sup>8</sup> Individuals I spoke with regularly told me how nail polish, because it was not "natural" was haram. Furthermore, nail polish itself directly indexed certain immodest habits associated with the non-Muslim, Western world.

<sup>9</sup> There is a great deal of literature connecting Greek, particularly Aristotelian virtue ethics with the rise of Islamic morality that I will not go into here, but is worthy of mentioning. See for example Levy 1962.

and interdependence of reasoned moral action (*phronesis*), creative production (*poiesis*) and philosophical thought (*praxis*). In this light, morality is “not a coherent, imposed system, a specific set of rules, an unequivocal code, or an uncompromising disciplinary order to which people are obliged to submit unqualifiedly—as in effect, simply another form of power—but the forms and acts by which commitments are engaged and virtue accomplished—the practical judgments people make about how to live their lives wisely and well and, in the course of making them, do live their lives, albeit in the face of numerous constraints. This is ... action that is informed by culturally dense understandings of the complexities of judgment, the social contexts of commitments, and the fine line between happy and unhappy actions” (Lambek 2000:315).

Drawing on Aristotle, in his 2000 article, Michael Lambek argues that morality needs to be rescued “as a relatively autonomous practice” (311). He argues that to more fully understand religion as both powerful and controlling *and* empowering we need to reincorporate the idea that there is reasoned action undertaken creatively by the individual; it is both rational and poetic or creative and it includes the subjective interpretation and decision-making. “Virtue is not merely the property of adherence to the terms established through performative acts but, in pursuing excellence, something which initiates them in the right circumstances” (2000: 315).

Recent uses of Aristotelian virtue ethics by anthropologists have also involved references to Foucault. For Foucault, there are four main aspects of ethics deserving of attention when unpacking morality and moral worlds in society. First, Foucault looks at the “substance of ethics,” or those aspects of the self that are in most need of regulation. In much of his writing, he illustrates this by observing the frequent attention paid to the

human body, specifically to sexuality. The second aspect of morality important to Foucault is what he calls the “mode of subjectivation.” For him, this is how people are shown their moral obligations, such as through law or religious ideology, or, perhaps more precisely, they are shown toward which authority or set of ideologies they should assess and regulate their own behavior. The third aspect of morality explores how a person becomes an ethical subject. These techniques or technologies of the self are the operations one performs on oneself in order to be more ethical. Finally, the *telos* is the mode of being that a person desires to achieve (see Foucault 1990; Mahmood 2005: 27).

For Mahmood (2005), Foucault provides the theoretical means for overcoming the ever-present dichotomy between structure and agency, or between enacting or subverting norms, by redirecting our attention to these aspects of morality that have particular relevance to the behaviors and desires of the individual (see also Asad 1993, 2003). Mahmood (2005) has argued that women in Egyptian piety movements are realizing themselves (as agents) by strictly adhering to specific moral norms and behavioral expectations. Blurring the lines between autonomy and power, she argues that Egyptian women are exercising their own agency and claiming their moral personhood by following strict Islamic expectations or ethically virtuous responsibilities.

In his work among the Minangkabau in Western Sumatra, Indonesia, Gregory Simon (2009) contributes to this conversation about morality as it is constructed in reference to Islamic ideologies and practices. For Simon, the “moral” includes “the processes through which actors work to fashion themselves as particular kinds of persons” (Simon 2009:258). Like Mahmood, Simon pays attention to individuals’ realization of moral subjectivity through specific Islamic practices. Through prayer



(*shalat*) they embody their submission to God, and in doing so attempt to negotiate the various contradictions and difficulties characteristic of human life. While the lived human world is inherently “messy,” Islam is perfect and the Truth and therefore individuals “must strive to constitute a properly “Muslim” self while also existing in the human world” (2009:248). The messiness to which Simon refers in particular here is the tension between an Islam, understood as requiring autonomous agency, and a traditional, village-based system of social order, which defines proper ways of interacting, including kinship and property relations, ritual life, and etiquette (2009:263). The possibility of reconciling two experiences of self (social and autonomous), according to Simon, is central to the symbolic power of *shalat*. Prayer is about submission to God *and* to community and social requirements but must be an act of individual will. “It is through the performance of *shalat* that the capacities of a moral self are said to be realized. Some people claimed to me that in the absence of *shalat* such a realization was impossible, an idea that no one discussed in connection with any other Islamic practice” (2009:259).

Similar to what Mahmood and Simon observed, I believe that Somali women are trying to construct ethical selves by drawing from specific Muslim ideologies (see also Asad 1993, 2003). Unlike what Mahmood observed, however, I find that the civil war, flight and resettlement, as well as the massive changes undergone in Somali culture, have all led to an insecure moment for Somalis in which the authority through which individuals regulate and define themselves is uncertain and changing. As such, in addition to self-regulating technologies of self painstakingly undertaken by individuals, acts of defining authority have themselves become good ethical work.

### *Suffering and morality*

Robbins and Zigon are both interested in the reasoning and conditions behind individual actions at moments of moral breakdown or change.

For Zigon, people put in such situations do ethical work on themselves in order to reshape their embodied morality such that they can return to living routine moral lives. I see people in the same situation as performing what we might want to call ‘value-work.’ I mean by this that they attempt to establish new value hierarchies, or reestablish old ones, for the domain in which they are acting. If they can accomplish this, they will know which value they should try to realize and how best to realize it, and knowing how to think in this way is the substance of morality on my account (Robbins 2009a: 284).

The attention paid to morality (and faith) during times of crisis and change is certainly well-documented around the world (Csordas 2009; Robbins 2004, 2007, 2009a, 2009b; Zigon 2007, 2008, 2009). In her recent article about Pentecostalism in Post-war Sierra Leone, for example, Rosalind Shaw (2007) illustrates how, in order to understand and deal with their experiences and life during the war, groups of young people are constructing and performing elaborate plays that hinge on the rigid construction of good and bad based in Pentecostal Christian moral doctrine. In a similarly poetic way, Deogratias Bagilishya (2000) points out how he and his family drew on proverbs and parables that reminded them of what proper Rwandans would do in order to forgive the man who killed his son.

Somali faith and morality are seen as both spiritual and physical, and (as we will see in Chapters 5 and 6), physical and mental illness is often an external symptom of immorality or the neglect of one’s duties of piety. Although the moralized body (and pathologized ill body) is not new in anthropology (c.f. Comaroff 1993; Farmer 2003; Fordham 2001; Foucault 1990 [1978]; Geurts 2002; Livingston 2005; Ochs and Capps

1997), there have recently been several studies that illustrate this relationship again and in new ways.

In their article about morality and the “big three” explanations of suffering, Much, Mhapatra, and Park (2003) point out how folk psychology is shaped by the context in which practices and institutions are aimed at “finding fault, righting wrongs, and gaining control over future events” (80). For them, one of the seven ontologies of suffering most frequently employed is the moral, in which suffering is a result of one’s own actions or intentions and significantly, the loss of moral fiber is the “prelude to misfortune” (79). They continue, “Moral therapy [therefore] focuses on unloading one’s sin, purification, reparation, moral education, and the adoption of “right practices” sanctioned by sacred authority” (79).

In her book, Culture and the Senses, Kathryn Linn Geurts (2002) illustrates how in Ghana among the Anlo-Ewe speaking peoples, local forms of morality and moral sensibilities are expressed through kinesthetic sensations specifically relating to balance and flexibility. Indeed, for these individuals, the ways in which they organize experience in terms of elements of sensation become the “ways of understanding and expressing morality” (74). Moral sensibilities, then for Geurts and others (see also Throop 2008), are rooted in how senses are coded and patterned.

In his work on Yapese morality, C. Jason Throop (2008), explores how “local understandings of subjectivity, social action, and morality may work to recurrently orient individuals to first selecting and then re-casting certain elements of their dysphoric experiences in light of core cultural virtues” (258). Specifically, he is looking at the connections between Yapese morality and sensations associated with pain, effort,

exertion and suffering. And following Robbins (2004), Throop argues that the experiences of pain, when properly coded and understood, ultimately facilitate the creation of ethical subjectivities. When it is transformed from “mere-suffering” to “suffering-for,” suffering effectively paints the pain itself as a virtuous sensation and connects the single temporal event to the sufferer’s past actions and possible future “self-states” (272). “...This temporal stretching is at least partially accomplished through an articulation of ongoing painful sensations with the virtues of endurance, effortful exertion, self-governance and compassion – all virtues that may provide a meaningful bridge to a sufferer’s history of past actions, as well as to possible future self-states in which his or her moral strivings may be potentially realized” (272).

Morality, then, provides a lens through which we can observe how people are moving forward both physically and personally after violence and in symbolic dialogue with the physical and emotional pain they are surviving. Looking carefully at how people define the good and bad in such contexts also allows us to observe the often contested and debated ways meaning is being made in a post-war context.

### *The didactic construction of morality*

The Somali moral project I have referred to hinges very closely on the different, and often competing, ways Somali refugees understand how to express and perform their Islamic faith. In what is an almost clichéd ethnographic experience for young anthropologists, during an interview that was failing miserably I was told by a group of elderly women that I had been asking the wrong questions. I had been asking about how local poets were involved in the peace and community rehabilitation efforts. I had heard

many stories and read articles<sup>10</sup> about how historically Somali women poets were instrumental to ending conflict and reestablishing peace in Somalia as well as in the ethnic Somali areas of Kenya and Ethiopia, and I was hoping that this would still be the case. These women affirmed that they loved the poetry and the songs, and that poetry remains a very important part of Somali cultural history. They were healing and rebuilding, however, not because of poetry or the old poetic duels that were often employed to manage disputes, but because of their faith in God. Poetics and song, I learned, were only a vehicle for expressions of and praise for proper moral personhood.

Throughout my research, whenever goodness, piety, behavior, politics, and even health, were discussed, the first topic raised was always related to *iman*, or faith, and faith was something impossible without prayer (*shalat*) as well as other obligations of piety. For Somalis, faith is not only made up of a passive belief. They did not talk about it in terms of “letting go” or “just believing” as I have heard people do in other religious contexts. For the people I spoke to, rather, *iman* is conceptualized as a kind of reservoir that is filled and re-filled through the actions of being a good Somali and, specifically, a good Muslim. Faith is something one *does* rather than something one simply has. To have a full faith, one needs to do the ethical and spiritual work of constantly refilling it. Similar to what Thomas Csordas (2009) recently found in a Charismatic Renewal church, Somali spiritual and moral worlds are not characterized by passive acceptance of faith or behavioral norms, “but rather on an active engagement characterized by dynamic and contested processes, and it is through these processes that individuals make meaning out of and reconstruct the moral code of their culture” (Csordas 2009: 417).

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<sup>10</sup> I will discuss this at length in Chapter 7, the Poetics of Morality.

For the women and men I worked with in Eastleigh, morality was, perhaps not surprisingly, closely entwined with their practices and beliefs based on Sunni Islam. As I was told repeatedly, and as can be found in the Qur'an and hadith, the Muslim moral person has a number of pillars individuals must adhere to, the primary responsibility being of course the justification of the heart: "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his apostle." The verbal utterance of *tawhid* (the assertion of the oneness of God) along with the fulfillment of the statutory duties (*arkan*) of the religion (almsgiving, worship, fasting, and pilgrimage to Mecca), are the branches of belief and the duties of all Muslims. Adherence to these dictates are the basics of Muslim morality and Somali moral personhood offers no exception (Levy 1962).

But, as is illustrated through the incident with the nail polish, Somali morality in Eastleigh does not reside exclusively in the domain of prescribed religious practice. Indeed, as with that incident, I believe that there is a certain didactic morality at play; one can be pious and ethical *by* instructing others about their own (im)morality or (un)ethical actions. This was certainly not confined to teaching me, a non-Muslim foreigner, how to comport myself properly; Somalis in Eastleigh were constantly counseling, teaching, reprimanding, and reminding each other of moral parameters through everyday interactions, all day long. For example, in a conversation with some women in the market, Maryan was approached by one of the older women in the group who commented on how Maryan was dressed. Although she was completely covered, she was not wearing the jilbaab, like the rest of the women in the room. The old woman told her that since she was an adult now, she should begin wearing the jilbaab instead of simply a tight headscarf; it was time for her to be more modest. As the old woman singled Maryan

out, the rest of the women in the small stall agreed with her and Maryan spent several minutes listening to them lecture.

Somali morality also includes reference to and negotiations with an ideology of pan-Somali nationness or *Soomalinimo*. Indeed, nearly every person had a story of a relative who had gone “bad” or “were lost to them” because once they went abroad, they ignored the plight of people still living in Somalia or in Kenya. In many ways, nationness and faith are also inseparable. Most Somalis I interviewed believed that as Muslims they could not talk about differences; there is only one Islam. Over and over again I heard about how Somalis are one nation, one religion and one language (glossing over obvious and glaring variations of and claims to authenticity). For many of the people I interviewed, the people who were continuing to try to divide Somalia clearly demonstrated their lack or weakness of *iman*. Ironically, conversely, there were also people who believed that those individuals who were fighting against the Transitional Government were also saving the country and therefore proving their ethical personhood.

There are specific aspects of pan-Somali nationalism that allow individuals to revise and re-imagine Somalia in a language of morality (including its global diasporic communities) that values clans without factionalism and nation without a currently functioning state or country. Here again, Mama Fadumo and Jawahar elaborate:

And that is because we are all Somalis. Whether they are Arab Somalis from Somalia, whether they are *Reer Xamar*<sup>11</sup> from Somalia. We are all Somalis but we are different. If someone [gives birth to a] child we go visit, but not because of our tribal basis. We are Hawiye, Darood, and all the other tribes. But when we are together, we are not like the ones who are fighting. We are like brothers and sisters. We all know each other. I know half of the people in this market regardless of their tribe.

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<sup>11</sup> Translated from Somali to mean “the Family of Mogadishu,” which is often used to describe anyone from southern Somalia with connections to Mogadishu.

I use “Somali morality,” therefore broadly, though also specifically. By focusing on morality, and the construction and definition of good and bad, I can and am including those aspects of nationhood, religion and faith, legality, clan, gender, self, and place that inform how individual men and women experience and create their senses of self and community within (not apart from) this context of tragedy, violence and insecurity. By using morality as my analytical lens, I am enabled to explore the space in which individual and society intersect. Furthermore, based on my understanding of morality, this focus allows me to explore the many ways individuals and groups are contesting and creating definitions of good and bad. This conflict is itself part of the construction of morality that is vital to the reconstruction of Somali persons and Somali communities.

Through a project of defining the good and bad, and *being* good, then, I argue that Somalis living in Eastleigh are accomplishing several things simultaneously. When the civil war started and the Somali state collapsed, the Somali community as a whole experienced a large-scale moral crisis. Individually, men and women were also confronted by various personal moral crises and immoral and violent experiences. Reconstructing their moral worlds and redefining what is ethical is not only about reestablishing a pre-existing moral homeostasis. Rather, it is about dealing with the various conflicts and changes that have characterized the entire experience of war, flight, and resettlement.

### **Women, iman, and moral practice**

If a kid doesn't have a mother, he will not be upright. Without mothers then, the whole community would be in trouble. (60 year-old Khadija)



As I stated earlier, for logistical and pragmatic purposes, I focused my attention on Somali women. Because I am a woman, I had uneven access to women's and men's worlds. As a non-Muslim white woman, I was excluded almost entirely from Aqwaani men's worlds and it would never have been appropriate or culturally acceptable for me to be alone (or even with my research assistant) in private with a man or group of men if they were not religious leaders or closely related to my research assistant. I am exploring how Somali women are engaged in ethical work as they redefine and rebuild their moral world. I observe how the various aspects and responsibilities pertaining to faith and piety, to nationality, to clan and family, and to selfhood all contribute to a discussion about what it means to be a good Somali woman. That said, in the course of my research I found that there was a gendered argument to be made<sup>12</sup>.

A person's faith is the foundation upon which her morality is based. Somali women, according to the various sheikhs I talked to as well as with most Somali women themselves, will never have a completely full or heavy iman. Due to restrictions placed on her when she menstruates, as well as because she is simply weaker, she constantly runs a higher risk of illness and immorality than men. The most commonly cited story used as evidence that women are morally weaker is the creation story. Here, Sheikh Ahmed, a Sunni sheikh explains:

And so the women who are claiming to be Muslims and even those who know the Qur'an, do not completely comprehend the meaning. And so women are weak. They are susceptible to shaytan. And how does it show? When you look at the people in this world, and you look at the first person, Adam, who was created by Allah, after he was created, then Hawa was created from his rib. And immediately Hawa came carrying the shaytan. And so women are like that. And so right from where they originally came from they were carrying shaytan on their backs. And he

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<sup>12</sup> I am approaching this somewhat tenuously, however, as I did not have the same access to data about men.

has been going through them and whispering things to them. And it was the cause for humans to be thrown out of paradise. And Hawa was led into that by Shaytan. Shaytan whispered things to her. He took her to a place with water and showed her her own reflection. At that time there were no other humans. “Look at this,” Shaytan told her. And when she saw her reflection, he told her the woman she saw was her co-wife, and he whispered those things to her and made her doubt. Hawa came to Adam at that time and doubted him and was jealous. So every girl who is a human is easily susceptible to be whispered to by the shaytan. And it is easier for her to believe those whispers than it is with men. It is a tradition.

Because of this susceptibility, women must attend to their ethical duties of faith and virtue with heightened attention<sup>13</sup>. Ironically, they thereby become the principal actors of reformulating the strictures of moral behavior.

As is common in immigrant communities around the world, Somali women are at the heart of social networks, international family communication and ties, and family survival and well-being. The Somali community is no exception. My research suggests that Somali women are in many ways the “back-bone” of Somali society. Their position in the clan-structure requires (allows) them to navigate around otherwise potentially rigid clan lines<sup>14</sup>. This facilitates, then, women’s ability to promote specific ideals of nationalism and anti-clannism in new contexts and gatherings around Eastleigh. Likewise, I heard repeatedly that clan was something women were uninterested in. Men, on the other hand were mired in their desire to maintain rigid politicized clan-lines. Indeed, as I discuss more thoroughly in Chapter 3, women’s wedding celebrations, for

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<sup>13</sup> As I will show in subsequent chapters, however, definitions of good womanhood and of experiences as women vis-à-vis clan, religion, occupation and family structure vary quite a bit.

<sup>14</sup> Somali traditional socio-political organization was based on patrilineal segmentary lineage agnatic groups. Descent passed through the patriline and marriage was ideally clan-exogamous cross-cousin marriage. As such, a married woman would potentially “belong” to both the lineage of her father and the lineage of her husband (which would have to be different). While her sons would carry the lineage of their father, her daughters, after marriage, would also carry membership in two clans. Thus, a woman’s uterine group could potentially be comprised of any number of different clan-family names and responsibilities. I will go into more detail about the kin structure in the next chapter.

example, where the Somali nation, as a nation of Muslims is prioritized and clan divisions are downplayed, could be viewed as new public spaces within which the Somali moral world is being re-imagined. Through these and other rituals, Somali women are performatively and ritualistically doing this ethical work of creating a sense of oneness as a moral Muslim Somali community.

Repeatedly women told me that women were the heads of the vast majority of families in Eastleigh. Women were the primary bread-winners for large extended families, they were responsible for ensuring proper religious education and discipline in their children and nieces and nephews, they coordinated various community and international support networks to assist family members and close friends around the world in need<sup>15</sup>. Anecdotally, I was frequently told that “70% of Somali households were headed by women,” and that in Eastleigh, one could not find the husbands. For example, in a conversation with Mama Fadumo one day, she told me:

But listen, Somali women who are in Nairobi today, all of them are the same. None of them are with their husbands because if the men cannot pay for rent, and daily upkeep, then he will look for another woman...he will go to some other place. He leaves you, sneaks out. Like me now, I am taking care of the children and I do not lay an eye on their father.

Historically, formal political participation was largely the domain of older men. While certainly women contributed dramatically to determinations of good and proper womanhood, personhood, and behavior, men possessed the formal authority to create these definitions (see Barnes and Boddy 1996; Kapteijns 1997; Lewis 1999). Further, according to most of the elderly women I interviewed in Eastleigh, Somali women did

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<sup>15</sup> One group of women I worked with quite closely throughout my research told me that shortly after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans, they collected several thousand US Dollars from various successful Somali women business owners around Eastleigh and sent the money to one of the relief organizations assisting the victims.

not have equal access to Qur'anic schooling as men when they were growing up in Somalia. While Siyaad Barre passed laws in the 1970s that gave women certain access to property and personal rights, women remained largely excluded from the public sphere up until the civil war in 1991.

Moreover, since the collapse of the Somali state and the subsequent flight into exile, many women have become widows, divorcees or simply abandoned by their husbands who, according to these women, could not handle the stress of life in the family. A 60 year-old woman in one of the markets told me:

The ideal woman is the one who builds up the family; the ideal mother is holding the family together, disciplining by guiding them to the right path. She must be very strong, capable of taking care of the house – she must be outstanding. She has to be stronger than the man so no one crosses her territory. She takes care of the money, the food, and the religion/spiritual path of the children. If she was not able to do this, she would not be able to support her family or the community.

And a 48-year-old woman concurred:

The ideal Somali woman back in Somalia took care of the house, the family and the kids. At the same time, she studied the religion and languages. Now it is changed a lot because women are the ones who have to bring the food home as well.

Adding to the conversation, a 24 year-old woman stated:

Everyone has a different opinion of the ideal Somali woman. Even if she is divorced she is the one who will take care of and educate the child. It is true; the women are the backbone of the Somali community. Women are doing everything. Men are rare and reluctant to work; it is the male ego. They don't have a government so they don't want to work.

And another 60 year-old woman elaborated:

It is true that women are the backbone of the Somali community. They are very much more open-minded about things than men – this holds the community together. She brings the husband's family together with her family – that way we are just one community in one room. Even if outside

there are problems. A woman is responsible for these things because of the religion.

Back in Somalia women used to sit in the house and take care of the family. At no time then did the man go abroad and leave the wife to work like now. The thing that makes women also have to work a lot now is that men don't have that much work to do that is appropriate for them. The man is not working because there is no government, so the woman has to look out for her family and work to take care of them.

In Eastleigh, with absent husbands and fathers, women are increasingly relying on close uterine ties and groups for support and companionship.

When I was chatting with Mama Fadumo and her niece, Jawahar, one day, they were both complaining about Somali men. Men are "*fadhi kudirir*" Fadumo told me, they are just uselessly sitting around and talking politics [while women suffer and struggle to help their families survive]. Women were solely responsible for the well-being of their families and community, they explained to me; women are the backbone of Somali society according to Fadumo, Jawahar, and nearly every other Somali woman I talked to in Eastleigh. Many men, they told me, had abandoned their wives, and the rest of them were simply unwilling to work to support their families. Too many of them stay up all night in cafes chewing miraa, drinking tea and talking, and then coming home in the morning to sleep all day, they both complained.

Nearly every woman I talked to in Eastleigh lived in a female-headed household, in which not only was the woman the primary breadwinner, but she was also responsible for the discipline of the children, for the allocation of resources to various tasks and purchases, for the proper religious and secular education of the children, as well as for the safety, health and feeding of the family. Further, in addition to being responsible for her own children, women are now regularly responsible for the various "cousins" and "aunts"

who show up in Eastleigh, for their ailing parents (and sometimes the parents of their absentee husbands), and for the orphaned children they take in and foster. Each of these actions is couched in terms of religious and social responsibility.

Outside the home, Somali women are also gaining access to some formal political venues. When the transitional parliament was elected in 2000, it was decided that in addition to each of the 5 major clan families having seats, Somali women, dubbed the 6<sup>th</sup> clan family, were also slotted to have 12% of the parliamentary positions. This movement was spearheaded by Somali human rights and political activist, Asha Haji Elmi.

In recent years, too, with an increase in their access to formal Qur'anic education funded by organizations coming out of Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Pakistan, women are learning about and working toward virtuous self-realization and community reconstruction defined specifically along new conservative lines. Young women in particular are shifting their practices and beliefs to more conservative paths. Just during the time I spent in Kenya between 2005-2008, definitions of and stories about good womanhood and good women changed drastically to favor much more Islamist (Salafi/Aqwaani<sup>16</sup>) ideals (see Chapters 2 and 4)<sup>17</sup>. Within this broad context of social and structural change, and in new contexts in which women are finding themselves in new roles of authority, knowledge, and power, in spite of being inherently morally weaker, female moral personhood is a growing social concern and project.

## **Methods**

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<sup>16</sup> In Chapter 2 I explain in more detail the local terms used to describe different groups of Muslims, including Aqwaani, Salafi, Wahhabi, and Sufi.

<sup>17</sup> See also Abu-Lugod 2009; MacIntosh 2009;

The argument I am making is based on data I collected through 21 months of fieldwork between 2005 and 2008 in the Eastleigh neighborhood of Nairobi, Kenya, where conservative estimates suggest that approximately 60,000 – 100,000 Somali refugees now live. For security reasons<sup>18</sup>, I did not live in Eastleigh, but commuted there daily. In 2005, I spent much of the three months shadowing one Somali woman, Mama Fadumo, and her family. I spent my days with her in her market stall, went to weddings with her, spent time with her family in their home, and met her friends and colleagues. During this time I conducted multiple formal and informal interviews with Fadumo and her family and friends, conducted three planned group interviews and multiple impromptu group conversations in a variety of social settings. I met Mama Fadumo through a friend of mine who teaches in an Eastleigh primary school.

During this time I also met with and interviewed several current and former employees, including three Somali translators, working with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Joint Voluntary Agency (JVA), which was responsible for pre-screening interviews of refugees slotted for resettlement in the United States, and the Hebrew

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<sup>18</sup> Eastleigh was unsafe for me to live in for a few reasons. Without going into too much detail about my decision to commute rather than to live in Eastleigh, one of the most compelling was due to the sense of insecurity many of the people I was working with felt when I mentioned my desire to have an apartment there. Based on what I represented as a young, single, white American woman, I would bring unnecessary and unwanted attention from thieves, those with a distaste of the US and its policies, and the police to any building I lived in. I stayed in an upper class hotel in Eastleigh one night in 2005 and when I was checking in, the concierge asked me for my passport. When I told him I did not have it with me, he asked me “You can’t check in without a passport. How will people know you were here if Al-Qaeda bombs the building?” There were also a couple times during my fieldwork when, after a few people said things I did not hear to research assistants I was walking with, I was rushed onto a passing matatu to leave the neighborhood. I was also told by people I worked with in Eastleigh that I should avoid remaining in Eastleigh after dark. (In my security session with the US Embassy upon my arrival, I was actually told that the Embassy would not guarantee my safety if I ever went to Eastleigh). When leaving a wedding around 11 pm with two Somali women, 1 Somali man and 1 Kenyan woman, we hit a pothole, which flattened our tire and bent the axel. Rather than stopping and addressing the issue, the young Somali man driving kept the car moving until we left Eastleigh. Furthermore, I was led to believe by renting an apartment I would increase the cost of rent for other tenants.

Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), which all served the Somali refugee communities around Kenya.

When I returned to Kenya in 2006, I continued to spend most of my time in Eastleigh with different Somali women and their families and as time went on, I met and got to know dozens of people quite well. Over the course of my research, I conducted household surveys with 68 female heads of households from four different large residential buildings and four of the biggest malls in Eastleigh, and talked with over 300 women and men using the same interview schedule each time, in which I asked questions about household size and demographics, income, religious affiliation, arrival date to Eastleigh and route taken to get to Eastleigh. I conducted follow-up interviews, life story interviews, and healing interviews with 30 of these women. During each of the healing interviews, I collected PTSD checklist survey information based on the DSM-IV diagnostic criteria<sup>19</sup>. In addition to formal, planned interviews with all of these women, I collected hundreds of open-ended unscheduled interviews and conversations with people throughout the market, during events such as weddings and prayer sessions, and in people's homes when I visited friends and acquaintances. The vast majority of all of the interviews I conducted were ultimately group interviews because although I scheduled a meeting with one person in particular, there was invariably an audience of family and friends in attendance.

I worked especially closely with several individuals as key informants, each were experts in their particular fields. I interviewed two local well-known poets. Mama Dhofo, one of the poets I interviewed at length several times is the most famous poet in

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<sup>19</sup> I will go into more detail about my use of the PTSD checklist in Chapter 6 where I discuss a local idiom of distress, called buufis.



Eastleigh. She is hired to perform at all formal political events and is the most sought after poet to perform at weddings and parties. Her expertise in Somali poetics and her insight about the role of poetry in contemporary Somali society was invaluable. I also interviewed 4 sheikhs at length. Three of them were non-Sufi and one was Sufi<sup>20</sup>. Due to the fact that I am a non-Muslim woman, I was never granted access to speak with conservative Aqwaani male sheikhs. To account for this hole in my data collection, I regularly passed the information I collected from the different sheikhs by the Aqwaani women I was able to speak with throughout the course of my research. In addition to these local experts, I worked very closely with my research assistants, whose parents came to Eastleigh within the last twenty years, and who were personally very interested and learned in Somali cultural and political history, and who spoke Somali, Swahili and English fluently.

I interviewed seven women, who were the CEOs of different NGOs working with the Somali community in Nairobi and in North Eastern Kenya, the Kenyan ambassador to Somalia, the headmasters of two of the local private schools catering to the Somali community, the owners and managers of the Barakat hotel in Eastleigh that was constructed to provide rooms to visiting Somalis now living in Europe and North America. I conducted three different group interviews with women about buufis and three different group interviews about Somali poetics and music. I conducted these interviews with careful attention to the demographic make-up of the group so that there was a fair representation of age, clan, and socio-economic status. I attended five weddings

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<sup>20</sup> In Chapter 4, I will introduce the sheikhs with whom I spent the most of my time, including information on their biographical backgrounds and identifications.

personally and watched hundreds of videos of weddings with people in their homes.<sup>21</sup> I also went to the Friday evening prayer session, the dhikr, four times over the course of my research, each of which lasted around six hours, and I interviewed people during and following each of these events. During my fieldwork, I also spent countless hours simply hanging out with people. I accompanied people as they ran errands; I visited them in their homes and at work.

Vital to the success of my research, however, was my work with my research assistants. Osop, Yahye and Maryan were invaluable to me, both as translators and cultural liaisons. Osop and Maryan accompanied me daily in Eastleigh. We met every morning before going to Eastleigh to discuss interviews, observations, and strategies. We also sat down and talked at the end of every day's research to discuss what we had learned and observed. Together we went through every interview and every field note to verify that we had observed the same things. They recruited specialists to interview and scheduled many of my interviews and focus group settings.

All of my interviews were conducted in Somali through an interpreter. Although I could have conducted some of the interviews in Somali or Swahili myself, due to the sensitive nature of the topics we covered, as well as due to the highly poetic nature of the Somali language, I preferred conducting my research through translators. As such, I worked very closely with each of my research assistants in terms of my expectations of translation and in terms of following up for clarity. Yahye, a brilliant linguist and fluent in Somali, Swahili, English, and Arabic, was able to help me transcribe and translate all

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<sup>21</sup> Because weddings and prayer sessions usually went late into the night, and it was unsafe for me to remain in Eastleigh very late at night, I was unable to attend very many of these events personally. Watching the videos of these weddings and parties, however, proved a very useful tool for discussing proper and improper behavior.

of my recorded interviews. His language skills helped me unpack many of the layers of meaning attached to everyday conversation, as well as to the poetry I was able to record while I conducted my research. I interviewed all three of my research assistants at length through my fieldwork time and tested many of the interview questions on them before trying them out in the field.

Yahye, Osop, and Maryan also validated my presence and my claims for many of the people I spent time with in Eastleigh. In addition to helping me establish rapport, their presence assured many of the people I would ultimately interview and spend time with that I would be respectful of their culture and religion. Approximately six months into my long-term fieldwork, I started being shadowed by one of three Somalis: two men and one woman. Whenever I was in public, one of the three of them was nearby, listening to what I was asking and saying. I firmly believe that without Osop, Yahye or Maryan there, I would have been regulated and monitored by the community even more closely, and perhaps even not permitted to do my research. Several times during the course of my research, an incident would happen and one of my research assistants or one of my friends would rush me onto a matatu to get out of Eastleigh. Although I was very respectful, I was not trusted and even not liked by some people simply because of who and what I represented. During the course of my research I was spat on, peed on, insulted, verbally attacked, slapped and harassed. Shortly after Saddam Hussein was hung, southern Somalia was bombed repeatedly by the US, and the US supported, Ethiopian-backed, Somali Transitional Federal Government re-claimed Mogadishu from the Union of Islamic Courts, the anti-American sentiment in Eastleigh was quite high. I was asked by my friends not to come to Eastleigh at this time because although they themselves had

no problem with me, they did not know when or if someone else might. Once again, my research assistants were invaluable during this time.

Finally, as I grew to know people better in the community, and was treated less like a visitor and therefore my behavior assessed more closely (and pointed out more regularly), I had to change the way I dressed. When I first started doing this research in 2005, I did not veil or wear a buibui. I wore a long skirt, long-sleeved shirts, and wore a scarf draped over my shoulders. When I returned in 2006, I quickly learned that I should wear a buibui and headscarf. When I did this initially, I was very positively received. People in the market, who had previously been reluctant to talk to me, were suddenly open and warm. When I returned to Eastleigh in 2008, I was treated like I was trying to wear a disguise in my buibui. People regularly shouted things like, “Don’t you let her insult the religion,” and “What, are you a snitch” to my research assistants when I walked through the market. When I discussed this with Maryan, who I worked with in 2008, she suggested that I not wear the buibui anymore, but instead wear a long skirt, a long jacket, a scarf and a smaller headscarf over my hair. Indeed, when I finally got the dress right, I was rewarded by 60 year old Safiya:

We don’t have any problems with you at all. You can be any religion you want to be and we will still welcome you. Especially because you have this respect and modesty. You are wearing this long skirt and that is good. Someday you will come to Somalia and we will give you a jilbaab. Would you wear a jilbaab if we gave you one? You will wear it, you will learn more about our culture, you will marry a good Somali man and you will become a Muslim. Then your children will be truly blessed. We will have respect for you and accept you so long as you don’t interfere in our religion. We will support you until you interfere. If you try to damage our religion – then we will not accept you anymore. People will like you unless you interfere. We are very hard on that. There are too many of you trying to interfere right now with our religion and we really don’t like that. That is why you may be getting some people who are rude around you.

## **Outline of Chapters.**

To illustrate the argument I make in this dissertation, I will trace my discussion of Somali moral worlds through and into several contexts. After a brief review in Chapter 2 of the socio-political history of Somalia and its civil war, as well as Kenya's refugee policy, I will begin my analysis with a discussion about how Somalis are constructing Eastleigh as moral place.

In Chapter 3, called Mapping Eastleigh into a Somali Moral Geography, I argue that Somalis are constructing Eastleigh as a place that is more than simply a diaspora. It physically embodies the contradictions of experience and efforts toward meaning-making with which Somali individuals must contend. Through the physical construction of space as simultaneously Somalia, Kenya, and refugee camp, as morally pure and physically impure, and through certain rituals and ritualized behaviors, Somalis are making a moral place out of a diasporic space.

In Chapter 4, I outline how morality is possessed by and possesses individual Somalis. Through a discussion of the contradictory ways a person can build her iman, in specific reference to relationships with the jinn, in healing ceremonies and rituals, I explore how Somali women in Eastleigh differently construct their own faiths in practice. I argue that through the ethical work of piety and spiritual health maintenance, individuals realize their own moral personhood and through it contribute to new Somali moral worlds more broadly.

In Chapter 5, I discuss how different Somali women are moralizing their pasts and their journeys with specific reference to certain ideals of Somali personhood and experience. By doing this, I believe they are making aspects of their past and their culture

usable in the present as they rebuild their worlds and lives for the future. But in Chapter 6, I unpack the various ways things can go wrong physically and mentally if a person does not attend to her responsibilities of faith and morality. Finally, in Chapter 7, I look at how individuals within Eastleigh and in some parts of ‘the abroad’ are creatively using song and poetics as vehicles for expressions of proper moral personhood and then what kind of effect they have on larger socio-moral worlds.

## **2. Making a Moral State and Moving Along**

### **Introduction**

To situate my discussion of morality within the Somali community in Eastleigh, it is necessary first to give a general background not only on the emergence of Islam in Somalia, but also of the Somali clan structure, as both clan and Islam are featured prominently in discussions of Somali morality and both are closely intertwined with perceptions of and experiences with the violence and healing in Somalia and in Eastleigh. I will begin with a discussion of the ways in which individuals in Eastleigh use and understand terms like “Sunni,” “Sufi,” “Aqwaani,” “Wahhabi,” “Salafi” and so on. Although there is a rich theological history surrounding each of these categories, throughout this dissertation I will take an emic approach and use them in the ways Eastleigh Somalis themselves do. I also provide a brief background of Islam more generally in Somalia and in the Horn of Africa. Following this, I will present a short history of the Somali clan structure, as well as contemporary criticisms of some of the more structural-functional analyses of kinship. Finally, before providing a general overview of the Somali civil war and the subsequent flight of Somalis to Eastleigh, I will show how tensions between and among clan structures, Islam, and politics have a deep history in Somali society.

### **Labeling and Categorizing Somali Muslims**

Somalis are almost all Sunni Muslims.<sup>22</sup> Although there was a range of activities undertaken to praise and worship God, all of the women and men I spoke with considered themselves to be Sunni Muslims. Throughout the time I worked in Eastleigh, however, there emerged a number of labels and terms that individual men or women would use to either self-identify or to describe and categorize other people. When I first began my research, I did not hear people differentiate each other in such a way<sup>23</sup>.

The first term I heard people use to describe others, and specifically here, individuals who undertook certain sartorial and devotional practices and behaviors, were commonly derogatorily referred to as “Wahhabis.” They were criticized for allowing their clothing to drag through the mud, such as Shukhri’s<sup>24</sup> comment below:

The Wahhabis have no respect. They think they are being respectful by wearing such big jilbaabs and the niqaab, but then when they arrive in the mosque to pray, their clothing is covered in mud, and they do not even wash themselves before they enter. That kind of clothing is not Somali, we do not need to cover our face like that and everyone knows it is bad to enter a mosque to pray before washing yourself.

The Wahhabis were also a source of distrust and suspicion, according to many of the individuals whom I met and spoke with early in my research. The women identified as Wahhabis were accused of hiding behind their face veils and buibuis, stealing from shops without being seen or known, and for pretending to be proper Muslims in public, but then

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<sup>22</sup> I only heard of one Somali who has renounced Islam during the course of my research. Although I did meet individuals who did not pray regularly, who drank alcohol and did other things that could be, and were, considered un-Islamic, most of these individuals still self-identified as Sunni Muslims.

<sup>23</sup> Indeed, as I knew that historically Somalis regularly self-identified as Sufis, in the beginning of my research I would often inquire about which order in which individuals belonged. With a few exceptions when someone would say that they were Sufi, most people at this time emphasized the oneness of Islam and called themselves (in translation) “just Muslims.” Many were actually frustrated by me when I asked such a question, as for them, I was presuming a heterogeneity of Muslims that should not exist.

<sup>24</sup> Shukhri is a woman I spent a great deal of time with throughout my research and one whose story I talk about at length in Chapter 6.



leaving Eastleigh to become prostitutes or to go out drinking alcohol or dating without being recognized.

As time passed, however, new terms to describe different groups and people began to surface in the course of my research. The two terms used to describe people, and more specifically the behavioral, devotional, and sartorial actions they undertook, were “Aqwaani” and “Sufi.” For many whom I talked to, people either self-identifying or being labeled as one were often discursively positioned at odds or in opposition to the other<sup>25</sup>. Again, I want to reiterate that all of the Somalis in Eastleigh considered themselves Sunni Muslims; the opposition between the two groups was emerging in response to a newer more conservative path of Islam that had grown increasingly politically and socially powerful and popular in Eastleigh. The influence of this path of Islam, which would still be pejoratively referred to by some as “Wahhabism,” was believed to come out of Saudi Arabia and Yemen and for those who followed this path, they believed it was more “true” or authentic as it condemned different spiritual and devotional practices<sup>26</sup> often associated with the mystical Islamic tradition called *tasawwuf*.

Colloquially those individuals who identified with this path called themselves “Aqwaanis,” or among the more learned of individuals, typically those who studied in institutions in Saudi Arabia or Yemen, they called themselves “Salafi.” Based on how individuals in Eastleigh talked about this group, those people who identified as Aqwaani

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<sup>25</sup> I will discuss in more detail the opposition, perceived or otherwise, between Aqwaanis and Sufis, in Chapter 4.

<sup>26</sup> The practices associated with this tradition that were most condemned by followers of this path were invoking God’s name in the recitation of the dhikr (and often culminating in a state of trance), the veneration of Saints and generally subscribing to the belief that one could enlist spirits and saints close to God to intercede on one’s behalf.

or Salafi self-consciously aligned themselves with more global, conservative paths of Islam that rejected the moral and religious pollution identified in Western countries and in impure practices undertaken by other Muslims. As my research progressed, more and more people I talked to began identifying as Aqwaanis. They usually coupled this self-identification with behavior not limited to refraining from the devotional practices they saw as ‘polytheistic’, but including changing mundane daily activities, such as ways of dressing and even of moving around the city. Increasingly, for instance, women were encouraged to stop walking around in public without a close male family member present. Further, many of these women began to become more politically involved with and supportive of the various Islamic political and social agendas monopolizing Somali politics.

In a conversation with Idil, for instance, whose life story I will discuss in Chapter 5, she explained how she had recently “realized” how the Aqwaani interpretation of appropriate Islamic devotional rituals was correct. She explained how when she was in Mogadishu, she had always attended the dhikr and how she thought that wearing a buibui or jilbaab was unnecessary. She did not wear such immodest clothing as miniskirts, which other women in Mogadishu were doing in the mid-1980s, but it was not until recent years, she explained, that she realized that Aqwaani modesty and piety were more Islamic than those practices in which she had previously participated. In late 2007, she told me that she was no longer a Sufi, but was now “leaning toward” the Aqwaani “side” and that she would teach her children, particularly her daughters, about how to compose themselves and worship in a way in accordance with the Aqwaani interpretations.

Ultimately, by the end of my research in 2008, many of the women and men I interviewed who had previously self-identified as Sufis, including one of my research assistants, began “realizing the truth” in how the Aqwaanis understood their faith and subsequently behaved. Likewise, those who had previously told me they were “just Muslim” had grown comfortable and were in the habit of referring to themselves and others as Aqwaani.

The opposing category of people in Eastleigh, “Sufi,” is used linguistically by people in Eastleigh to refer to those men and women who, while they also engage in activities associated more generally with Sunni Islam, also practice devotional activities such as the *dhikr* and the veneration of the Saints usually associated with the mystical tradition of Islam called *tasawwuf*. As I stated earlier, “Sufi practices” are available to all Muslims. Nevertheless, there is often a reification of the group “Sufi,” particularly in contexts in which such “Sufi practices” offer the most obvious (or used) means of distinguishing between groups of people; this misleads individuals to assume that “Sufi” is a distinct, autonomous category or group apart from other Muslims.

Somalis in Eastleigh use the term Sufi now to refer to the people who practice such devotional practices. Historically, as I will show later in this chapter and again in Chapter 4, the term Sufi referred to people who were members of specific *turuq* (orders) in Somalia (most commonly the Qadiriyya and Salahiyya). While many of the Sufis I spoke with in Eastleigh still identified with a particular Qadiriyya order, for the most part, colloquially, “Sufi” referred simply to a group of people who would attend the *dhikr*, would venerate saints, and would often, rather than exorcising jinn, usually pacify them through feasts or other such means.

By the time I left Eastleigh, as I will go into more detail about in Chapter 4, there were a number of people who, even if they still identified themselves as Sufi (though there were many who no longer did), felt a great deal of social pressure (and potential persecution) to stop “being” Sufi<sup>27</sup>. Indeed, as I will also go into more detail later, Sufis were viewed by non-Sufis as engaging in immoral and un-Islamic practices.

As I will show in subsequent sections, however, Islamic purity and Islamic revival movements occurred in Somalia in the past from both within, and external to, various Sufi *turuqs*. Before I do, however, I now turn to the history of Islam in Somalia and the Horn of Africa more generally.

### **History of Islam in the Horn**

The emergence of Islam in the Horn of Africa<sup>28</sup> coincided with the decline of the Aksum Kingdom in what is now Ethiopia, with the first communities to adopt Islam associated with the trading centers along the coast frequented by Muslims from the Arabian Peninsula. The Dahlak Islands, then a center for Ethiopian trade, embraced Islam in the eighth century and was in regular contact with the Islamic state in Baghdad (Kapteijns 2000; Lewis 1998).

In the tenth century following the rise of the Fatimid dynasty in Egypt and the revival of the Red Sea trade, the Horn experienced an intensification of Islamization.

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<sup>27</sup> There is, of course, a significant political dimension to this debate and movement. I do not discuss this at length in this dissertation but will pursue this analysis in future research. That said, given the increased participation in the political events in Somalia, at least discursively, and followed by a more vocal criticism of Sufism (such as when one woman told me that as soon as peace was established in Somalia, the next people to be removed would be the Sufis), one could draw very potent and direct connections between socially sanctioned Islamic practices and political agendas.

<sup>28</sup> In referring to the “Horn of Africa” I refer to the area of Africa that now consists of Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia and to a lesser extent, the Northeastern Province of Kenya where ethnic Somalis reside.

Subsequently, by the 12<sup>th</sup> century, there were multiple Muslim communities in the otherwise Christian Ethiopian highlands. A series of Islamic principalities had also been established along the long-distance trade routes along the coast from southern Amhara and Shewa in the north all the way down to the Rift Valley lakes in the south. According to 14<sup>th</sup> century Arab geographers, these principalities were known as “the country of Zeila” (Kapteijns 2000; Lewis 1997), or in its widest extension known as Adal, in Somaliland. Mogadishu in Somalia, established perhaps as early as the 8<sup>th</sup> century (Lewis 1997; Cerulli 1924) functioned as a powerful Islamic and Arab-Somali trading colony (Cerulli 1924; Lewis 1997) and blossomed into sultanate in the 12<sup>th</sup> century as did the other Somali cities of Brava and Merca. According to 12<sup>th</sup> century geographer al-Idrisi, Merca became the first unambiguously Somali city as it was a center of Hawiye Somalis. There is little doubt, therefore, that by the 13<sup>th</sup> century, many of the nomadic and urban peoples living in Somalia had now become Muslims.

By 1420, much of northern Somalia was under the control of the sultanate of Adal, which occupied the whole Afar plain. During this time, however, there was increased fighting between the non-Muslim Ethiopian state and the Muslim sultanate of Adal became intense. At this time, the term “Somali” first appeared in Ethiopian documents and it is largely credited to the fact that Adal drew heavily on Somali fighting power. The constant fighting, however, drove the largely mercantile and agricultural groups into the arms of charismatic leaders, who adopted the title of imam, and who defined their goals in Islamic terms. These imams declared holy war against Christian Ethiopia in the 1500s and the fighting reached its peak under Imam Ahmad b. Ibrahim al-Ghazi of Harar (Kapteijns 2000).

Imam Ahmad's jihad occurred at a significant time for the Muslim coalition. The combined results of a weakened Ethiopian state as a result of its overexpansion, the Portuguese desire to replace the Coptic church in Ethiopia with Roman Catholicism and the Ottoman direct territorial invasion allowed Imam Ahmad to control much of the region until his death in 1543. His death, however, led to the almost immediate collapse of the Islamic imamate of Ethiopia due to the fact that there was general disorder and disorganization in decisions about how to proceed in his absence. Following this, although there remained a Muslim presence in the area, this collapse led to several centuries of mistreatment of Muslims by Christians in the area, particularly in Ethiopia, until the 18<sup>th</sup> century when various Oromo groups became central actors in the expansion of Islam in the highlands (Kapteijns 2000).

Largely in response to increased European and colonial presence in the area, life in the Horn beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was characterized by a rather widespread Islamic revival. It expressed itself in attempts to deepen Islamic piety among rulers and commoners alike, in efforts to convert non-Muslims to Islam, in the composition of many works of Islamic scholarship, teaching and devotion, and in the introduction of innovative forms of social organizations, such as the Somali *jama'a*, or religious settlement. It also led to the widespread adoption of more militant stances against both the Christian Ethiopian state and the European colonizing powers. Indeed, between 1880 and 1918, life in the Horn was characterized by an Islamic militancy.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, new brotherhoods founded by Ahmad ibn Idris were founded in Horn and the previously existing orders underwent intensification. These reformist agendas were all-encompassing and emphasized religious devotional practices

that avoided sensual stimulation and rejected *tawassul*, the belief that deceased or living “holy men” could intercede with God for the common believer.

In Somalia, Muslim religious leaders played central roles in Muslim principalities long before 1800 such as the sultanate of Mogadishu, the Ajuraan confederacy (1500-1700), and the Geledi federation, which was established after 1750. The brotherhoods influence on the interior emerges in the early 1800s, for the Qadiri sheikhs credited with the popularization of the order all lived in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Sheikh Uways Muhammad Muhyi al-Din (1847-1882) founded a *tariqa* settlement (*jamaa* in Somali) in Biyole, along the upper region of the Juba river in southern Somalia. Sheikh Abd al-Rahman b. Abdallah al-Shashi, who died in 1919, and who was better known among Somalis as Sheikh Sufi, had a center in Mogadishu. Sheikh Abd al-Rahman al Zaylai (1820-1882) had a *jamaa* at Qulunqul in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, which is home to a large ethnic Somali population. They were known for their insistence on humble, pure Islamic lifestyles and for their commitment to teaching both Islam and the Arabic language. Importantly, each of these groups sought to promote a communal identity based on Islam rather than on kinship, and indeed, Somalis from different clans resided in these *jamaas* calling each other *Ikhwaan*, or brothers. (Kapteijns 2000; Lewis 1997; Marchal 2004).

The biggest rival to these Qadiri settlements and the Qadiriyya brotherhood was the Salihyya brotherhood. The Salihyya was established in Mecca by Muhammad Salih (1854-1919) and introduced to Somalia by Sheikh Sayyid Muhammad in his jihad, which began in 1898. By this time, the Qadiriyya was perceived as being associated with the colonial governments and was seen as cooperating with the Christian European

administrators and businesspeople. It also, according particularly to the Salihyya, stood for a more mystical and less puritanical form of Islam. The Salihyya, in contrast, insisted on militancy and holy war against both Christian colonizers and their Muslim collaborators. Its reformist agenda included a strong desire to purify the country (Kapteijns 2000; Lewis 1997; Vikor 2000).

One of the most well-known and vocal members of the Salihyya was Sayyid Muhammad (1898-1920), who, often referred to by colonial administrators as the “mad mullah” declared holy war on local colonial administrators of British Somaliland and Italian Somalia. He was a puritanical sheikh, founder of a *jamaa*, a teacher and author of theological treatises, a jihad leader and an advocate of communal definition as Muslims rather than of clan. He was also personally motivated in establishing an Islamic Somali state.

His motivation of placing emphasis on Islam rather than on clan was in direct opposition to the French, Italian, and British policies of promoting kin-based realities, relations, and governance as the more authentic ones. As such, they greatly limited the application of Islamic law, promoted certain forms of Islam over others, and often appointed middle-class, foreign functionaries who were imported from Muslim colonies in which the colonial dominion was well-established.

The promotion of Islam over Somali kin-based identity was its most prominent initially in these early *jamaas*. Many of the political and militant movements of the region, which articulated their motivation and goals in Islamic terms, were led by Sufi sheikhs. But as was stated earlier, when Sayyid Muhammad founded his *jamaa*, he did so believing that many of these previously established *tariqa* settlements were far too



complacent to the colonizers. Indeed, many leaders, like Muhammad, protested the Somali language tutelage in public schools, in favor of Arabic, and like their Kenyan-Somali neighbors, preferred to be classified as Asians (referencing their identification with the Arab world) rather than as Africans, and objected to any policy designed to underplay their Islamic identities.

In spite of the various attempts to downplay the local clan structure, lineage and kinship were and remain very important to the Somali world-view, as well as to obligations toward one another, to family, and to the country as a whole. In this next section, I will outline the basic kinship structure in Somali society prior to the Somali civil war, as well as how kinship relations and responsibilities contributed to understandings of Somali individual, social and political identity and membership.

### **Kinship structure in Somalia**

Somali society, according to British social anthropologists (Lewis 1994, 2002 [1965]), British, French, and Italian colonizers, and others (Mansur 1995; Samatar 1994a) was characterized by a segmentary lineage political system. Although many scholars argue that the role of kinship was reified during the period of colonization, when officials preferred to limit the influence Islam and Islamic law had on the people (c.f. Kapteijns 2000), kinship structures remain important to explain, particularly in light of how clan lines and affiliations became the mobilizing identities during the civil war.

According to the Lewis (1994, 2002 [1965]), kinship affiliations organized Somali society into *dia*-paying groups, or groups where blood money would be paid in the event of a feud. For Lewis (1994), *dia*-paying groups were the “basic jural and

political unit of Somali society” (20). They were corporate agnatic groups whose members united in joint responsibility and in opposition to other groups. They were further bound, as documented by Lewis during British colonial occupation in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, by formal political contracts (*heer or xeer*), which were lodged in district offices. These contracts were written treaties that outlined and defined the interests of the lineage members. Such contracts listed the *dia* compensation prices, which were relative to the general size of the group as well as the resources it owned. Generally, however, 100 camels would be paid in the event of a blood feud (Griffiths 2002; Lewis 1994, 2002 [1965]). Ahmed Samatar (1994a) postulates “that kinship, in essence was composed of two principal elements: (1) blood ties that referred to a shared identity, primarily through common male lineage (*tol*) and, to a lesser extent, marriage ties (*hidid*); and (2) a general code (*heer*)” (109).

The political and social structure of Somali society was, according to Lewis, akin to that of the Nuer of Sudan. Like the segmented lineage structure of the Nuer as documented by Evans-Pritchard (Evans-Pritchard 1940), Somali society was seen to descend from larger to smaller units: clan family → clan → sub-clan → primary lineage group → *dia*-paying group (Griffiths 2002: 31; Lewis 1994). Likewise, for these scholars, these kin groups were used to explain how groups maintained solidarity and alliance in the absence of a formal state government. Somali society was organized into six principal clan families: Darood, Hawiye, Isaaq, Dir, Digil, and Rahanweyn. Though no group was territorially delimited, they did tend to occupy particular geographic regions “i.e., the Isaaq and the Dir in the north; the Digil and Rahanweyn in the

agricultural areas in the South; the Hawiye in and around Mogadishu and the Darood in the south and the north” (Griffiths 2002: 32).

Historically (pre-Independence, pre-Civil War) Somali clan-families rarely acted as united corporate groups (Griffiths 2002; Lewis 1994). The corporate political group membership was generally confined to dia-paying groups or smaller sections of the sub-clan. As membership in the clan families could reach upwards to 200,000 members, political action along clan family lines would be difficult. “Although clan-family membership has political implications, in the traditional structure of society the clan-families never acted as united corporate groups for they are too large and unwieldy and their members too widely scattered” (Lewis 1994:20). At the same time, however, alliances within and between clan and sub-clan lines were frequent and beneficial for political alliances, diversification of resources, and so on. “In practice, every point of lineage segmentation – every ancestor in the genealogies – is at least potentially an axis of political division and unity” (Lewis 1994:22).

Most Somalis practice exogamous cross-cousin marriage. (The Benadir group, often understood as one distinct from the main clan families in Somalia practiced endogamous marriage, however.<sup>29</sup>) Most marriages occurred between people of different primary lineages. Common phrases such as “We marry our enemies,” and “We don’t marry our friends,” indicate this pattern and are commonly used and cited throughout the literature about Somali marriage patterns (Afrax 1994; Ahmed 2004). According to

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<sup>29</sup> The “outcast” groups, or the politically marginalized agro-pastoralists, lived primarily in the inter-riverine region of Somalia located between the Jubba and the Shabeelle Rivers in the south. These groups included the Tumul, Migdan, Eyle, Yahar, and Yibr. They were commonly called the “Gosha” or people of the forest. The Benadir or Benadiri family consisted of the Hamari, Barawan, and Bajuni groups and the individuals were typically the traders, fishermen, and artisans in the cities. The Gosha and the Benadir groups were generally thought of as outside the clan family system in Somalia.

Andrzejewski, (1974) traditional Somali marriage had a considerable degree of stability since it was regarded as an important social link between groups. Alliances between feuding groups were often made through marriages between multiple members.

Status within these societies was determined by age and gender (Kapteijns 1994). The accumulation of wealth, the production of offspring (particularly male), and the wisdom accrued with experience (age) contributed to a man's ability to become an elder. Conflicts within and between societies were always discussed and resolved within the community of elders; resolution of said conflicts was then based on the contracts (*heer or xeer*) in the event that a feud needed to be resolved and blood money or dia needed to be paid.

For structuralists like Evans-Pritchard and Lewis, kinship provided the organizational structure in societies where a nation-state was not present. Kinship networks and associations provided societies with a system of rules by which their societies operated and functioned: order was maintained through the hierarchies and power structures associated with kinship alliances. Such beliefs, however, have been the targets of a great deal of criticism since the advent of such academic movements as post-structuralism etc. In the next section, I discuss some of the ways studies of kinship in its structuralist form have been challenged and adapted.

### **Criticism of Structural studies of Kinship and how it applies to Somalia**

As people returned to the locations where the older structuralist anthropologists had done their field work, they realized that structures, while useful, were not the only locations where culture or social organization could or should be observed. These social

structures, such as kin and genealogy, were not the only organizing or meaning giving mechanisms within societies. More importantly to these new studies perhaps was a challenge to the assumption that the structures created a unified system (Hutchinson 1996, 1998, 2000). In the introduction to her ethnography, Nuer Dilemmas, Sharon Hutchinson (1996) responds to the boundedness of structural understandings of societies as put forth by scholars like Evans-Pritchard and Lewis. She was interested in the ways scholars could move beyond static structural models rooted in the homogeneity and order in building an understanding of particular societies. She was interested in looking at Nuer social life in a more dynamic, historical, and processual framework. Later, Hutchinson (1998) writes, “whereas Evans-Pritchard, like many of his contemporaries was preoccupied during the 1930s and 40s with issues of ‘unity,’ ‘equilibrium,’ and ‘order,’ viewing culture as something shared and ethnography as the compilation of those shared elements, my own research has concentrated on evolving points of confusion and disagreement among Nuer, particularly with regard to the historical fluidity of their relations amongst themselves and with the world at large” (56). In this article, Hutchinson discusses the ways Nuer reconstruct their kin relations within a context in which there was a rise in the social significance and prevalence of money, paper, and guns.

Indeed, kinship studies characterized by mid-twentieth century ethnographers have been challenged and criticized a great deal for the limits they impose on individuals and societies. Janet Carsten (2004) writes, “Mid twentieth century studies on kinship lost sight of the most crucial experiential aspects of everyday relations” (17). She, like other critics of structural functionalist understandings of kinship, is more interested in the ways

people live and experience being related to others. Even further, limiting kinship relationships to their structural or organizational qualities also ignores the emotional qualities embedded and intrinsic within them. Peter Kivisto (2001) also stresses the emotional aspects involved in community making. “Under theorized in this formulation is the affective element contained in each of these ties. Thus, while a norm of reciprocity may define the structural pattern of remittances sent to family members, this is not primarily an instrumental transaction but one based in an emotional attachment to those left behind. Moreover, kinship networks can appropriately be seen, not as distinct from the transnational ethnic community, but as a constituent part of it” (568).

For Carsten and others, understanding kinship as a gradually created and negotiated process whereby individuals constantly and continually reconstruct and redefine their own definitions of kin relationships enhances scholars/outside’s awareness of the personal significance of kin for people. Indeed, for many individuals, the metaphor of kinship is chosen and applied to others based on actions and emotional commitment, not simply on legal or biological definitions. “Normal exchanges of kinship are not an automatic right, but a privilege that is earned through the demonstrated hard effort that goes into nurturing and caring for a child” (Carsten 2004:149). The same can be said, I would argue, for kinship exchanges that are not exclusively between parents and children. The possibilities for kinship and familial relationships to be constructed and to change are the very things that make kinship alliances so powerful. “It is these creative processes [the adaptability and change of kin] that lend kinship its very great symbolic force – a power that is all the more salient because it emanates from the emotional and practical circumstances of people’s everyday lives – from the things they

hold most dear and with which they are, in every sense familiar” (Carsten 2004:154). Kinship alliances, like clan membership, are cultural and social constructs rather than naturally occurring ones. Similarly, according to Lidwien Kapteijns (1994) in the Somali language, the word *tol* which means agnatic kin also means “to sew together” (1994:212).

Strategic use of kin terms and names for non-biological kin is a powerfully symbolic statement. Kinship as a metaphor when applied to individuals indexes mutual obligations and responsibilities akin to Marshall Sahlins’ “generalized reciprocity.” In his discussion of gender in language use Michael Silverstein (1985) suggests that understandings of linguistic categories can only be comprehensively understood when they are analyzed at the intersection among their structural usages, their pragmatic usages and their ideological usages. Kinship as a linguistic category, one that is employed by individuals in different contexts, can benefit from such an analysis. Structurally, users of language will use kinship terminology to refer to or address family members. The use of kinship terminology, however, also indexes a closeness or distance in social structure. Use of the term, “brother” for instance would reference a closeness or bond based on a culturally predefined set of rules and meanings. *Choosing* to use the term brother, however, may indicate a strategy or ideology within a larger socio-linguistic context.

To illustrate this briefly, in the Somali language, there are two different forms of the first person plural pronoun “we,” which is indicated in the suffixes of verbs and adjectives: the we-inclusive and the we-exclusive. “*Walaalkeenna*” means our (collective) brother. “*Walaalkayga*,” on the other hand, means our (not your) brother. Here, “-keena” and “-kayga” are the pronominal suffixes added to the noun “*walaal*” or

brother<sup>30</sup> (Orwin 1995). Structurally, this distinction is useful. It, however, indexes a hierarchy or closeness of relationships in society. Choosing to use the we-inclusive or the we-exclusive forms can, then, reference a set of political or social ideologies within a particular context. It references mutual membership in a particular group or identification with a specific philosophy. Such references could potentially put pressure on the receiver of the we-inclusive as it suggests the obligations of the collective or kin, particularly in post-civil war Somalia. Using the we-exclusive, on the other hand, would socially distance the speaker from the listener, which could be interpreted as affronting or alienating.

In his novel, Links, Somali author Nuruddin Farah (2003) demonstrates the significance of the pronominal usage. “Jeebleh,” a Somali expatriate academic living in the United States, has just returned to Somalia since the Civil War started in 1991. Within the first fifty pages of the book, he is troubled by the use of “we” by different people he meets. After having been referred to with the collective “we” by a hotel manager (who Jeebleh believes is in cahoots with his enemy) he troubles.

It had been one thing talking to the Major, who thought of him as an outsider; it was altogether another to be in the company of the manager with his inclusive “we”! What was he to do? Spurn Ali, who wished to relate to him, or welcome the inclusion, and yet keep a discreet distance, for his life might depend on it? He thought of how it was characteristic of civil wars to produce a multiplicity of pronominal affiliations, of first-person singulars tucked away in the plural, of third person plurals meant to separate one group from another. The confusion pointed to the weakness of the exclusive claims made by first-person plurals, as understood implicitly in the singled-out singular. He remembered a saying, “Never trust a self-definer, because an ‘I’ spoken by a self-definer is less trustworthy than a she-goat in the habit of sucking her own teats,” and it made good sense

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<sup>30</sup> “Walaal” is also the word for sister. In Somali to indicate the difference between our (inclusive) sister and our (exclusive) sister, you would change the first two letters of the suffix: walaasheena/walaashayga.



when he thought about how Somalis drove him crazy with their abuse of pronouns, now inclusive, now exclusive (2003:42-43).

Kinship ideologies are here embedded in the pronominal categories and they point to politicized ideologies of belonging and not belonging that were made rigid during the civil war in Somalia.

Metaphors of kinship, as was stated earlier, can carry profound symbolic and political weight. The metaphor of nation as family is both powerful and provocative. When the idea of the nation is couched in the rhetoric of the family, it carries emotional and political power capable of unifying (at least in an imagined sense) differences under one however fictive or constructed identity; it can structure feelings and experiences of nationhood. These metaphors of kinship, further, have the capacity to become the “metaphors we live by” (Carsten 2004; Lakoff and Johnson 1980). These metaphors become particularly salient in times of war, such as in Somalia. While during the Somali civil war the nation as family metaphor was not applied to the entire country, it was used along politicized lines separating clan families and essentialized to a certain extent the “family” included within each clan; each patrilineal clan line became a realized metaphor of family. For Carsten (2004) “...if we combine Lakoff and Johnson’s insights with the observation that, in the extreme, this particular metaphor [nation as family] may transform itself into a quite literal reality, then perhaps we may begin to find an answer to Anderson’s question about the emotional appeal of nationalism” (161). Within the Somali context, it seems as if we are finding the answer, not to the emotional appeal of nationalism per se, but to the appeal of a unified imagined collective under the banner of a single name.

In Eastleigh, agnatic kin terms and relations are used to garner support, assistance and allegiance. Importantly, however, “kin” is being used to include relatives who are genealogically farther and farther away from individuals, particularly when someone needs help, and metaphors of kinship are being used in terms of brothers and sisters in Islam. The use of these metaphors, at least in theory, carries with it the requisite familial obligations and duties. Indeed, in the beginning of nearly every interview, my research assistants would collaborate with the person I would be interviewing to identify their genealogical connection. Kinship structures, criticisms and limitations notwithstanding, remain very important to Somalis.

In the next section, in a brief history of Somalia and the subsequent collapse of the Somali state in 1991, I will show how both kinship and Islam are mobilized at different times to construct social identities, and political agendas. In certain cases, particularly immediately following the collapse, Islamic groups were inculcated into kinship identities and ideologies. It is therefore irresponsible to discount structural components of kinship, particularly as we are motivated to see kinship as a lived experience.

### **Somali Political History in discussion with Islamism and Clannism**

There have been many academic discussions and debates about what led to the Somali Civil War in 1991; there are many different and competing hypotheses about the causes. Complicating this is the pronounced lack of scholarly studies of Somalia from any perspective, due if only in part to the highly protective nature of the Barre regime (Simons 1995) and its vice grip on information about the State. A handful of scholars

maintained access to the nation, however, and it is upon these studies that I rely. Some scholars have tied contemporary politicized clan identities to “roots” in traditional Somali clan families, loyalties and rivalries (Griffiths 2002; Lewis 1994, 2002 [1965]). Others are more interested in the ways the colonial governments essentialized clan identities (Kapteijns 1994) and the ways the politics of the Cold War weakened the state (Cassanelli 2003 [1996]). Attention has also been paid to the capitalist economy and the rise of the middle class (Kapteijns 1994) in changing people’s social roles and access to power in facilitating a new kind of desire for material wealth that did not characterize the desires of the largely nomadic population. Suffice it to say that the ways people talk about Somali history remain highly politicized and sensitive to everyone involved. With this in mind, I think it remains necessary to include a brief history of the Somali state since independence and unification in 1960.

Contemporary Somalia was created as a unified republic on July 1, 1960 following the departure of both the Italian and the British colonial empires in the region. Prior to unification, what is currently northern Somalia was the British Protectorate of Somaliland and southern Somalia was Italian Somalia. (Afrax 1994; Besteman 1996; Besteman 1999; Besteman and Cassanelli 2003 [1996]; Cassanelli 2003 [1996]; Griffiths 2002; Kapteijns 1994; Samatar 1994a; Samatar 1994b; Simons 1994; Simons 1995).

Aden Abdille Osman was elected president of the first Somali Republic by the National Assembly. Upon his election, he nominated Abdirasheed Ali Sharmarke as executive Prime Minister of Somalia. In 1967, after Osman’s term ended, Sharmarke was elected as the new President. He, in turn, appointed M. I. Egal as the new Prime

Minister. This new regime provoked massive criticism. It was accused both publicly<sup>31</sup> (Afrax 1994) and privately of bloody, rigged elections, public censoring, and a narrowed base of state power. Further complicating the situation were the deepening economic difficulties generated by the Sharmarke regime (Afrax 1994; Besteman 1996; Besteman 1999; Besteman and Cassanelli 2003 [1996]; Cassanelli 2003 [1996]; Griffiths 2002; Kapteijns 1994; Samatar 1994a; Samatar 1994b; Simons 1994; Simons 1995). Finally, on October 15, 1969, President Sharmarke was assassinated. His assassination paved the way for a smooth and nonviolent military coup organized by the Supreme Revolutionary Council led by Siyaad Barre (Samatar 1994a). Once in office, Barre immediately set out to reform the country under the banner of “scientific socialism”. Initially, the Barre Revolution was received very well. The following are three verses of a poem sung by the Waabberi group in the early 1970s, which highlight this enthusiasm (Waabberi 1970s):

However, those similar to us in skin color  
Took over our state  
They acted against our interests  
And removed us from the right path

Then was born  
The revolution we support  
October dawned upon us  
And the army took us by the hand

Blessed rain fell upon us  
And made the country prosper  
They chose socialism for us  
And buried clannism  
They took good care of our affairs  
And organized our [national] life  
Teaching us socialist ways  
Oh God, Ever-Lasting  
Keep us on the right road  
And protect us from all evil

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<sup>31</sup> Afrax notes that through poetry Somalis expressed veiled criticisms of the government throughout this time.

Amen (translated by L. Kapteijns and M. Ali)

With his new position, Barre immediately abrogated the Constitution, disbanded the Supreme Court and cancelled the National Assembly. He forbade political activity and private political organizations, fully centralizing all aspects of the government to be under his control. During this time, he also banned public religious (Islamic) political formation and Islamic law. Indeed at several points during Barre's reign, when different *ulama* or other Islamic groups formed and expressed their criticism of the regime, he publicly executed those involved. The new scientific socialism "ushered in a wave of nationalizations which extended function of state to most aspects of (urban) life" (Samatar 1994a). Among the goals he cited for the future of the Somali state and people included creating a standard orthography for the Somali language<sup>32</sup>, eliminating tribalism or clannism, and promoting formal education. Important in the establishment of the orthography of the Somali language was the decision to use a Latin alphabet instead of an Arabic (or other) one. For many religious leaders, scholars, and politically motivated individuals, this was a bold and direct affront to their identification as Muslims first (Marchal 2004; Lewis 1997). In spite of his bold secular, or scientific socialist, policies, Somalia became a member of the Arab League in 1974, signally at least superficially, a recognition of Somalia as a nation of Muslims.

As time passed however, the Barre regime began to sour in people's esteems. By the mid 1970s, "...Siyaad Barre's leadership and the SRC's synonymity with a horrid style of governance was crystallizing. Increasingly, the state was identified with concentrated power, fear and intimidation, and disregard for any form of law and due

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<sup>32</sup> Standard Somali Orthography was established in 1972.

process” (Samatar 1994a). In 1977 Barre declared war on Ethiopia in an attempt to reclaim the Ogaden region in which a large number of ethnic Somalis lived. The Somali-Ethiopian War (1977-78) ignited deep nationalist sentiments as “Somalis attempted to recoup one of their ‘missing territories’” (Samatar 1994a). With new support from the Soviet Union, Cuba, and South Yemen (who in this act abandoned their support of Somalia), Ethiopia gained an enormous upper hand and the war turned radically in their favor. The Somali armed forces retreated to Somalia.

“Bearing the triple burden of defeat in the war and the accompanying national humiliation, an economy on the skids, and a lack of superpower patronage, Somali politics turned viciously inward” (Samatar 1994:117). For many scholars, the appeal for national unity and nationalism preached by the Barre regime before and throughout the war with Ethiopia became an increasingly transparent veil behind which political self interest and clan identity were being mobilized (Griffiths 2002; Kapteijns 1994; Samatar 1994a; Simons 1995).

In the early 1980s, in response to the disastrous conclusion to the Somali-Ethiopian War and a general growing distaste for the Barre regime, new political opposition groups were forming around the country, including the Somali National Movement (SNM) and the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF). This defeat in the Ogaden war, in concert with the Iranian Revolution, served to invigorate the process of political Islamism in Somalia. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, several Islamist groups emerged, though many of them were forced to remain underground. Also in 1980, a new group of former religious students of Saudi institutions established for the first time in

Somalia a group called the *Salafi*, which gained some support among urban youth in particular.

In May 1988, the SNM launched coordinated attacks on the northern cities of Hargeisa and Burao to oppose the Barre Regime in general and in response to the government official's targeting of Isaaq clan members. The SNM gained control of both cities temporarily, but lost them again to Barre's militias in July. Both sides, as well as those stuck in the middle suffered massive losses.

While the SNM was recuperating, the Hawiye clan in the south founded the United Somali Congress (USC) in opposition to Barre. Simultaneously, refugees from the Ogaden region of Ethiopia living in Hargeisa formed their own Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM). In 1990 the USC and the SPM united in a coalition against Barre, who reformed his own supporters as the Darood clan affiliated Somali National Front (SNF). In January 1991, the combined forces of the USC and SPM successfully overthrew the Barre regime and the government officially disbanded.

Only a handful of months after Barre fled Mogadishu, however, the former coalition dissolved in factional disputes. Not only did the USC and SPM no longer see eye to eye, but the USC split into two different factions as well. The "Manifesto group," which consisted of members of the Abgal sub-clan of the Hawiye family, appointed Ali Mahdi Mohamed as interim president of Somalia. At the same time, the rest of the USC belonging to the rival Habar Gidir sub-clan of the Hawiye family looked toward General Aideed for presidential guidance. By September 1991, the final rupture between the two factions of the USC resulted in Ali Mahdi occupying the northern part of Mogadishu and General Aideed occupying the southern part of Mogadishu. Eventually Aideed and the

USC along with the SPM transmuted into the Somali National Alliance (SNA) (Besteman and Cassanelli 2003 [1996]; Cassanelli 2003 [1996]; Griffiths 2002; Samatar 1994a; Samatar 1994b; Simons 1994,1995).

At this time various Islamic NGOs and groups were founded as people struggled to claim order amidst the violence and chaos. With the heightened insecurity associated with the collapse of the state and the subsequent political and social contestations about the control of the government and the various Somali cities, people began to turn more regularly to the Qur'an for comfort and were praying more regularly. According to political historian, Roland Marchal, "they had to be ready to die and were searching for some relief in the face of this havoc. Religion was also instrumental to providing a certain security" (2004:128). It did so not only for the cathartic benefits, but initially the more devout and conservative a person presented him or herself as being, the less likely they would be associated with upper class values (and the associated economic and former symbolic capital<sup>33</sup>). By the time Ali Mahdi was (somewhat dubiously) elected as President in 1991, various forms of Islamic expression were politically and strategically performed by individuals. One of the most frequently cited and most obvious examples of this were the drastic sartorial transformations undertaken by, specifically upper middle and upper class, women. During the 1980s, these Somali women would regularly be seen wearing Western style women's attire including such items as mini-skirts. As one of the women I interviewed explained to me, "people used to come from all over the world to admire the beauty of Somali women in their mini-skirts and high heels." When the Somali state collapsed, however, this Western-style women's clothing was replaced from

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<sup>33</sup> By the end of the 1980s, most of the individuals who occupied prestigious positions in the government were either related to or closely associated with Siyaad Barre and his Darood clan.



the much more traditional donning of *dirac* and *shaash*, the traditional Somali long, flowy dress and headscarf (Marchal 2004).

By late 1992, several Islamic groups and brotherhoods emerged on the Somali political landscape. The first notable brotherhood was Ahle Sunna wa Jama'a, which with support of the Hawiye political leader, General Aideed, was formed to counter the more radical trends and influence of foreign (Arabic) Islamic NGOs who were working with local Salafi groups. This brotherhood gathered prominent figures of traditional Islam in the southern parts of Somalia, the *tariqas*, especially from the Qadiriyya and Ahmadiyya. They were particularly influential in their coordination of pilgrimages to saints' shrines, in *mawlid* commemorations, and *dhikri* (*dhikr*) and *saar* ceremonies, which were widely practiced by Somalis in southern Somalia from 1993 (Manchur 2004).

Another Islamic reformist group that was established and began participating in the political sphere at this time was Ansar al Sunna, which was a Salafi organization made up of traders and returnees from Saudi Arabia, with close ongoing connections to Saudi Arabia and specifically with the Saudi Red Crescent that now operated in Somalia. It assisted individuals and families in a variety of ways including with medical assistance and education and, in line with the desire to promote a certain form of Islamic reformation, even paid US\$50 to families in which women dressed more modestly.

Likewise, Al Majina al-Islam was established in Mogadishu shortly after Siyaad Barre fled the country in 1991, with the goal of playing the role of the Supreme Islamic Council. This organization, though it only had limited influence, gathered *ulama* and Islamic scholars around Somalia who then claimed to represent all Muslims in Somalia and hoped to institute *shari'a* law in what they perceived as a corrupt, lawless society.

Perhaps the most influential, visible, radical, and long-standing Islamic reformist group that emerged at this time was Al-Itihaad al Islaami'a. It claimed power through violence among other means in a way unparalleled with most of the other groups. It obtained support and training from Sudan and invited "Afghans" to help establish training centers for individuals interested in learning more about (true) Islam as well as training in fighting. Al-Itihaad was also credited for establishing various educational and medical organizations to assist Somalis throughout the country, though it has been most frequently associated in the international press with the embassy bombings in Nairobi, Kenya and Tanzania.

The final two most widely recognized groups that emerged during this time were Al Tabliq and Al Islaah, the latter having no connection with the Al-Islaah group that briefly appeared on record in the early 1980s. Al Tabliq were known for quietist proselytization, traveling from town to town preaching about Islam on the streets and in local venues, with the desire to encourage Islam over violence. Al Islaah on the other hand was first an Islamic NGO operating at the interface between Somalis and the International Muslim NGOs, which hailed mostly from the Gulf States and especially from Kuwait. They contributed to the general trend toward political Islamism and opposed the presence of any Western institutions in certain fields like education.

None of these groups were immune to the ever-present role of clan, however. Indeed, as each group gained (and continues to gain) prominence and power in the political sphere, it would be declared a clan organization and ultimately "belong" to the clan of its leader. This fact proved time and time again to simultaneously frustrate and

bolster the claims to legitimacy and ultimately the success of the agendas the groups espoused.

### **Flight and Resettlement**

Within this tumultuous context, hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children fled first to the more rural parts of Somalia where their particular clans had historical ties and eventually to the neighboring countries of Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya. Wealthier individuals flew directly into cities such as Nairobi or Addis Ababa while most others relied on insecure ground transportation caravans and ships to bring them to safety (Affi 2004; Gardner and Warsame 2004b; Griffiths 2002; Ibrahim 2004; McGown 1999; Musse 2004). From these countries, many Somali refugees were then resettled into cities and countries around the world including, though certainly not limited to, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland and the United States, while others remained in Kenya, Djibouti, and Ethiopia. The refugees remaining in places such as Kenya either waited in refugee camps for permission to be resettled elsewhere, or eventually began to create communities for themselves among the Somalis already living in each of these places<sup>34</sup>.

Somali refugees began arriving in Kenya even before the state finally collapsed in 1991. The arrival of 400,000 Somali refugees<sup>35</sup> in 1990-1991 coincided with the

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<sup>34</sup> Through colonization, “ethnic” Somalis became citizens of Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya as borders were drawn. There is a common understanding among Somalis that there are five parts of Somalia: (Italian) Somalia, (British) Somaliland, Djibouti, eastern Ethiopia, and northeastern Kenya. Indeed the flag of Kenya boasts a five-point star to include each of the five areas of Somalia to include those Somalis living in these different states.

<sup>35</sup> Somalis have, of course, lived in Kenya and travelled to and from Somalia since before colonial times. Through pastoral grazing habits, trade routes and networks, and other reasons for migration, Somalis born in Somalia have always included Kenya in their migration patterns and destinations. In an interview with a man who conducted pre-screening interviews with Somali refugees in the Dadaab refugee camp, he told me

arrival of a large group of Sudanese young men and a large group from Ethiopia. Prior to 1991, the Kenyan government took responsibility for supporting the refugees it hosted, offering some economic and social service assistance to them. With the sudden huge influx, however, the Kenyan government could not longer handle them and sought assistance from the international community. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other aid organizations assumed the responsibility for assisting them, setting up refugee camps throughout the country. With this shift, Kenya adopted a unofficial “encampment policy” toward international refugees, which required them to go to and remain in one of the designated “transit centers” or refugee camps unless they possess proper paperwork from the UNHCR or other refugee processing organizations giving them permission to be in an urban area for an interview or while waiting for resettlement.

Prior to 1991, Kenya’s laissez-faire policy toward refugees made it relatively easy for them to integrate into Kenyan society. When the UN took over, however, they placed refugees in small tent camps throughout the country, many of which were near much more attractive urban centers. A large number of refugees settled in Mombasa and many started businesses (Horst 2006). By avoiding paying taxes, these refugees could offer their wares at unfairly low prices, which escalated many local tensions. The Kenyan government ultimately closed all but two of the refugee camps, Dadaab in Northeastern Kenya and Kakuma near the Sudanese border.

Kenyan law still lacks formal refugee legislation. Having signed the 1951 UN convention on refugees, which defines a refugee as any person who “owing to well-

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that frequently when asking refugees where they were born, they would name cities that are actually on the Kenyan border.

founded fear of being persecuted form reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country” (UNHCR 1996:22). As such, Kenya awarded Somali refugees temporary asylum based on a prima facie status; that is they are legally permitted in Kenya while they wait for resettlement or repatriation. Without formal Kenyan law about how to integrate the refugees into Kenyan society legally, Somali refugees are in an ad hoc permanent prima facie status. Owing to this unofficial encampment policy, any refugees caught by the police outside camps without the proper documentation are subject to a wide range of punishments including jail time, deportation, and fines, though avoidable usually through the payment of bribes.

In spite of the risk of being caught by the police, the only refugees who stay in the camps are those who lack the financial or social means to leave. The vast majority of them go to Eastleigh, where there is an enormous Somali community, and where they can get jobs, go to school, have better medical care options.

Although Eastleigh was established as an estate in 1912 by the colonial government for Asians and some wealthy Africans to occupy, and it remained a relatively comfortable Asian neighborhood until the 1970s, by the late 1980s, Somali trades-people, primarily women, had started to use it as a market area. These women would sell their wares out of their hotel rooms in Garissa Lodge. Since the 1980s, Eastleigh has experienced a major influx of Somali refugees and Somali businesses. Today, in spite of its deteriorating infrastructure, it is thriving in business and it is overwhelmingly inhabited and run by Somalis.

Having now outlined the social, religious and political contexts in which Somalis now find themselves, I turn now to how Somalis living in Kenya are mapping Eastleigh at the center of a Somali moral geography. In the next section, I will show how Somali women are physically, discursively and symbolically making Eastleigh a space within which they can (re-)define morality and ethical behavior in myriad creative and rational ways.

### 3. Mapping Eastleigh into a Somali Moral Geography

#### Introduction

We raced along the pock-marked road in a matatu driven by a man who seemed to delight in reminding his passengers of their own mortality. Reminiscent of the outrageously outfitted cars on MTV's popular reality program, "Pimp my Ride," each seat on the bus had its own video screen and there was a large flat screen television mounted in the wall separating the front cab where the driver sat, and the back general seating area. The interior was plastered with photographs of various American hip hop and rap artists, international super models in bikinis, and phrases in Swahili, English and Somali. The seat fabric pattern was geometric and loud. The video we watched as we left Nairobi's City Center displayed a man in a fur coat and large gold jewelry rapping next to a swimming pool in the courtyard of a beautiful house among dozens of dancing women wearing close to nothing. We could both hear and feel the bass of the music. I glanced at Osop who was sitting next to me in a thick, plum colored *jilbaab*<sup>36</sup>. She was glaring at the video screen. Catching me watching her, Osop grinned and then, gesturing toward the video and with a quick look of disgust, told me that this was what the youth were imitating when they went abroad. I nodded, but it was far too loud to continue the conversation, so I turned toward the window and Osop recommenced glaring at the music video.

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<sup>36</sup> A jilbaab is the thick dress/head covering, typically worn over a buibui. It is essentially a large thick sheet of fabric with a hole cut into it so that it fits snugly around the face. It can go down to a woman's waist or all the way to the ground, depending on her taste. It is the most conservative article of clothing a woman can wear without wearing a burqa or a niqaab (which is the face veil).

As we flew around the roundabout, slowing ever so slightly to allow the man selling bananas to jump on, I watched the scenery change outside the windows. The quality of the road deteriorated steadily and the amount of trash increased. Although there were still a few non-Somali market ladies on this number 9 matatu, most of the women both on and off it were veiled. Men wearing above-the-ankle trousers, sandals, and hennaed beards walked across the street dodging with grace the giant mud-filled potholes as well as the vehicles moving at near maniacal paces. We arrived in Little Mogadishu when we passed the city sign labeled “Eastleigh,” which stood in the middle of a large trash and mud pile on the side of the road.

There are various physical signs that one is entering a predominantly Somali neighborhood when you arrive in Eastleigh. The small butcheries along the street advertise halal (usually in Arabic script) *hilib geel* (Somali for camel meat) in hand-painted letters. The buses waiting to fill with passengers on the other side of the roundabout on General Waruingi Street are en route to Garissa, Wajir, and Mandera (Kenyan towns in the Northeastern Province near the Kenya-Somali border and the predominantly Somali refugee camp, Dadaab). Across the street from the Eastleigh sign is a newer mall called “Eastleigh Mall.” In one of its’ large windows is a prominent sign advertising the “Horn of Africa Management Institute.”<sup>37</sup> There is even a high-end, new hotel, the Barakat hotel, which was built by and for Somalis now living in Europe and North America<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> Kenya included in the Horn of Africa; the Horn only includes Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Djibouti.

<sup>38</sup> When the Transitional Federal Government holds meetings and conferences in Nairobi, most of the Members of Parliament stay in this hotel.



Somalis and non-Somalis alike call Eastleigh “Little Mogadishu.” When I asked people why they did this, the first reaction I invariably got was the obvious one: Eastleigh was called Little Mogadishu because of the number of Somalis who lived there. Beyond a rhetorical exercise, or simply giving the area a nick-name however, I argue that making Eastleigh into Somalia (or into a place where Somali morality can be revised and debated) is about having a space to be Somali – to do the everyday activities requisite of a good Somali person. There are mosques and/or prayer rooms in every building; street preachers walk through the market talking about the blessings of faith and a righteous path. The market, now largely owned and operated by Somalis, offers people a place to make a living and support their families<sup>39</sup>.

In this chapter I will look at how the neighborhood of Eastleigh, “Little Mogadishu,” is being discussed and created by Somalis living there as the center of a transnational Somali socio-moral map. I argue that although it lacks infrastructural support from the Kenyan government and is, therefore, a rather dirty and largely unpredictable (socially, politically, criminally) place, inside its buildings, in people’s homes and community centers, Eastleigh is conceived of as a quintessentially moral and therefore “clean” place for the resident Somalis, and is used as a place for the moral repurification of individuals who returning to Africa from third country resettlement locations.

Morality and meaning-making has been a key component of discussions of post-war and refugee communities in much of the literature (see Malkki 1995, Nordstrom 2003). Scholars have explored various creative strategies adopted by individuals and

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<sup>39</sup> They are able to work despite living in Eastleigh illegally (see chapter 2 and Kenya’s encampment policy).

communities to heal and move forward during after war and genocide (c.f. Bagilishiya 2000; Ross 2002). Strict attention paid to how people make meaning in these contexts is of vital importance, not only in highlighting the grace, resilience and agency often ignored when talking about such people, but in recognizing the processes through which people build and create.

In much of the early literature, refugees were portrayed as the quintessential (often gendered) victims. As Jaji (2009) writes, “Displacement caused by violent conflicts across the world is usually depicted through feminine corporeality or a category increasingly referred to as *womenandchildren* (Ehloe 1992)” (Jaji 2009:177). Or, as Malkki notes, “the ‘refugee,’ [is] captured by the journalist’s camera as a singularly expressive emissary of horror and powerlessness” (Malkki 1995:10). The refugee studies and post-conflict literature is also saturated with discussions about the long-term effects of physical and emotional trauma (see Ahearn 2000; Bracken et al. 1995; Hinton 1996; Hollifield et al. 2002; Jones 2002; Kidron 2004; Rousseau and Drapeau 2003; Rousseau, et al. 2001; Suarez-Orosco 1990). And in many discussions involving policy, aid, legality and nation, refugees represent a dangerous category of persons (see Daniel 1995).

Drawing on Victor Turner’s (1967) observations of transition and Mary Douglas’s (1966) discussions of purity and danger, Liisa Malkki (1995; 1997) points out that refugees in the “national order of things” are frequently seen as dangerous because without a state, they “blur national (read: natural) boundaries” (1995:8). As transitional beings, or as people who are neither in their home countries, nor *at home* in their host countries, they are particularly (potentially) polluting. They are betwixt and between (Turner 1967). Barbara Harrell-Bond and Eftihia Voutira (1992) also draw on this notion

as they point to a refugee's liminality in host countries, expanding it somewhat in their observation that refugees are fixed in a betwixt and between status that is "not only ... legal and psychological, but social and economic as well" (1992:7).

In her well cited book about Burundian Hutus living in exile in Tanzania, Liisa Malkki (1995) presents an "ethnography of displacement," arguing that studying refugees allow us to challenge this presumably inherent connection between physical place and sense of authenticity and identity as a group. For the Hutu refugees she worked with, displacement and, more specifically, life in the refugee camp itself, has become a form of categorical purity; the "real" Burundian Hutus live now in the refugee camps in Tanzania.

One's purity as a refugee had become a way of becoming purer and more powerful as a Hutu.... The "true nation" was imagined as a "moral community" being formed centrally by the "natives" in exile.... The homeland here is not so much a territorial or topographic entity as a moral destination. (1995:67)

Following Malkki, I believe that the Somalis living in Eastleigh are not trapped in a state of total liminality. I argue that Somalis are creatively and deliberately constructing their community in Eastleigh in deliberate ways in spite of their legal marginality and uncertainty in Kenya; mapping Eastleigh at the center of a socio-moral map, then, becomes another metaethical exercise. Although many individuals may still be waiting for third country resettlement while they are living in Kenya, they are also actively making meaning of their lives in exile, including in dialogue with Somali communities in other parts of the world, and through it they are making place out of space. Although I do not believe that they would imagine themselves as categorically *more* pure now living in Eastleigh, I believe individual Somalis remaining in Eastleigh, by attending to the metaethical projects of defining the good and bad and discursively and performatively

constructing Eastleigh as the place where it can happen best, rather than being an ethnography of *displacement*, as Malkki called her own work with the Hutu refugees in Tanzania, my work with Somalis could, at least in part, be considered an ethnography of *emplacement*.

Given the fundamentally transitional nature of Eastleigh itself (even if for many people, only imagined<sup>40</sup>), as well as it being the border-town of sorts between Somalia and the rest of the Somali world and due to the fact that the various Somali diasporas around the world are still very much connected, for Eastleigh to be a primary location in which this discussion of what is good and bad is occurring effectively maps Eastleigh as the central location wherein Somali morality is being defined. In doing so, it makes Eastleigh less the location of an ad hoc congregation of displaced refugees, and more a symbolic capital of a Somali nation that happens to have “towns” in various parts of the world.

Following this, as James Clifford (1997) pointed out, “The transnational connections linking diasporas need not be articulated primarily through a real or symbolic homeland.... Decentered, lateral connections may be as important as those formed around a teleology of origin/return. And a shared, ongoing history of displacement, suffering, adaptation or resistance may be as important as the projection of a specific origin” (306). In focusing on how individual Somalis around the world participate in the *making* of Somali morality in which Eastleigh is at least at certain moments imagined as

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<sup>40</sup> By imagined, here, I am referring to the fact that although many Somalis living in exile in Kenya still hope and even long for 3<sup>rd</sup> country resettlement, the vast majority of individuals will likely remain in Kenya until there is chance for return to Somalia. This has become even more of an issue for Somalis living in Eastleigh and in other parts of Kenya since 2008, when the Department of Homeland Security essentially froze the resettlement program due to a series of DNA testing and the suspected fraud of 80% of the Somali and Ethiopian family reunification cases.

the place where Somalis can be most moral, I can show how Eastleigh has been made far more symbolically important than simply the current location where a group of people are living in exile.

By mapping Eastleigh as a moral center, they are symbolically creating a distinction between the abroad, *dibadka*, and Eastleigh, whereby moral purity is more easily achieved in Eastleigh and pollution more likely in the *dibadka*. For most Somalis, the *dibadka* includes those countries in which Somalis now reside where Islam is not a primary religion. The *Dibadka* includes the U.S., Canada, Western and Northern European countries, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. By making this distinction, Somalis living in abroad countries such as the US are included as members of the Somali community, but people remaining in a relatively permanent state of transition in Eastleigh can make their lives and worlds morally meaningful.

### **Moral mapping and the politics of filth in a Kenyan city**

There are various physical indicators around Eastleigh that the people living there are refugees, not (only) Kenyan-Somalis, and that as refugees, they are part of a larger transnational Somali community. The UNHCR<sup>41</sup> (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) has a sub-office on the top floor of the Amco shopping mall on First Avenue, where refugees are processed for third country resettlement; there are UNHCR tarps covering various mattresses and other items for sale in the market. There is also an almost legendary “board” where JVA (Joint Voluntary Agency), the arm of the US government that does refugee pre-screening interviews, posts a list of the people who have been selected for advancement in the resettlement process. People can study any of the

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<sup>41</sup> The main UNHCR offices are on Rhapta Road in the Westlands suburb of Nairobi.

languages spoken in *dibadka* countries (i.e. Dutch, English, Swedish, Danish) in one of the many language-training centers on the ground floors of residential buildings throughout the neighborhood.

As I was told regularly, however, Eastleigh is not Somalia. The most striking piece of physical evidence to this fact is the mud. I spent a lot of time thinking about the mud in Eastleigh during my fieldwork. In interviews and casual conversations people regularly told me about how Somalia “did not have this kind of mud.” People complained constantly about it (although one of the signs that one was not a resident of Eastleigh was an inability to gracefully walk around and through it). On one of the roads separating two of the large malls in Eastleigh’s market area, the water/mud was so deep that the 2x4s, periodically placed to bridge the two sides of the road, would sink into the muck and/or just wash away within hours. The mud is a cocktail of raw sewage, garbage, dirt and water and in certain areas of the neighborhood, it actually moves along the road with a current. I regularly saw homeless people urinating in the larger puddles; people spat in them and threw their trash, fruit rinds and seeds in them. The third time we passed a particularly large trash/mud pile, Osop told me that it was frequently used as the dumpsite for abandoned newborns and aborted fetuses. We rarely walked by that pile again.

On days when I knew crossing those streets was unavoidable I occasionally volunteered to splurge on a taxi<sup>42</sup> or I would walk several blocks out of my way (much to the chagrin of my research assistants) to locate a drier place to cross. I would also always, when possible, sit on the matatu for the additional ten feet to let it cross the mud for me

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<sup>42</sup> I rarely succeeded in convincing my research assistants to take a cab, however. They understood that I did not have a lot of extra cash and both Osop and Maryan refused to let me “waste” money.

and I frequently planned my schedule of visits and interviews for the day so I would not have to cross particularly bad areas. Of course, I was not always successful in my attempts to avoid it. Frequently, on my ride home, people would move away from me after smelling the stench I carried from Eastleigh with me on my shoes.

Although Eastleigh is certainly not the only neighborhood in Nairobi where the roads are terrible and the infrastructure non-existent<sup>43</sup>, the mud/sewage problem in Eastleigh also indexes *for Somalis* the fact that they live in a country that is not theirs. This is revealed in Fatma's statement below:

Eastleigh is muddy. Mogadishu is more perfect than here. For example in Xamar there is not nearly as much mud – not much like here. And now everywhere in Eastleigh has been dumped on by garbage. People don't care because it is not their country.

At the same time, however, the Kenyan government's infrastructural inattention of the area (Wesangula 2008), most obviously represented by the massive sewage and mud problem,<sup>44</sup> adds symbolic weight to Somalis' sense that Eastleigh is nevertheless not actually in Kenya.

People regularly and frequently told me to beware the mud. Beyond just being dirty, a health hazard<sup>45</sup>, and simply inconvenient, people believe the evil jinn<sup>46</sup> reside in the mud and sewage making the physical dirt of Eastleigh actually spiritually polluted as

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<sup>43</sup> Many of the roads around the city are as scarred as those in Eastleigh and mud is ubiquitous in all of the informal settlements.

<sup>44</sup> In a December 2008 Daily Nation newspaper article, Daniel Wesangula points out that according to a recent survey done by the Nairobi Water and Sewage Company, most of the drainage outlets in Eastleigh had been blocked by plastic bags and bottles and that uncovered manholes are garbage dumpsites. In the same article, Wesangula notes that according to Nairobi City Planning Meeting minutes, upgrades for Eastleigh have been scheduled for the last decade but nothing has been started or put into motion; there is no evidence that this will change in the future either.

<sup>45</sup> There were several outbreaks of cholera and dysentery in Eastleigh while I was conducting my fieldwork.

<sup>46</sup> I will discuss the Jinn in depth in Chapter 4: Possessing Morality.

well. In one of several long conversations with Sheikh Ahmed, a Saudi trained Muslim scholar and local religious healer, he explained, “Islam is clean. We will not accept anything that stinks. Islam is very clean and very worthy. Muslims are not even allowed to live in a trashy place.” But they do.

So how does Eastleigh’s filth contribute to my argument about Somali moral worlds? Following Arthur Kleinman (2006) and other recent scholars of morality, I do not believe that moral worlds need to exclude violence or harm or even dirt. By moralizing the physical dirt, Eastleigh becomes a morally charged place.

Eastleigh embodies the various contradictions of life Somalis experience in exile. It is at once a refugee camp and a Somali city; it is physically filthy and in some places also spiritually filthy, but it is, as I argue throughout this dissertation, also a place of moral purity and authenticity. In spite of all its contradictions and juxtapositions, Eastleigh is a place where Somali moral world reconstruction happens. Through its seemingly contradictory construction as a home and as a place where people are waiting for third country resettlement, as Somalia and Kenya, and as dirty and clean, Eastleigh is made meaningful for Somalis living there. In this process, Somalis are mapping Eastleigh into a transnational Somali moral geography and, at least for the time being (and especially for those people living there), Eastleigh is the center of this moral map.

Morality and cleanliness (and consequently immorality and filth) have been connected both in the literature (see Douglas 1966; Foucault 1990) and in popular thought and discourse for centuries. Filth has frequently been portrayed as a threat to the moral order and those individuals who represent such filth are often pushed to the margins, or rendered “out of place” (see Douglas 1966; Modan 2007). “In invoking filth,



speakers presuppose a system of classification that delineates between purity and order, on the one hand, and impurity and disorder on the other. In this way, themes of filth signify a breach of (a preferred) order” (Modan 2007: 141).

Cultural geographer David Sibley (1995), in his research examining themes of filth from Classical Greek treatises to 20<sup>th</sup> century pop culture and media, has noted that filth itself has acted as a powerful category in identifying those individuals who fit in a society and those who don’t. When people violate the accepted (hegemonic) social, cultural or spatial norms, they are seen as a threat to mainstream society and are often then linguistically coded in terms of a language of filth and thus seen as a threat to the moral and spatial order of a community. This can also be seen in discussions of homeless individuals and drug addicts who are often described as living amidst garbage or filth (see Bourgois 2009; Modan 2007).

What is interesting, I believe, about Eastleigh and the discussions of the filth and mud present, is the somewhat contradictory way(s) the mud is codified as moral and immoral and how this then motivates the conceptual construction of Eastleigh as a moral place. As I stated earlier, Eastleigh is home to a large Somali population and people around Nairobi identify it as Little Mogadishu,<sup>47</sup> but also as I stated earlier, one of the clearest signs that Eastleigh was not Somalia was the mud and filth of Eastleigh. The mud and filth indexed, for Somalis, Kenya and the Kenyan governments inattention (and to a certain extent apathy) of the plight of Somali refugees. The mud then indexes the immorality of the Kenyan government but also in turn marks Somalis themselves as more

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<sup>47</sup> Kenyans, after finding out that I do research in Eastleigh, frequently responded that if I worked in Eastleigh I did not actually work in Kenya.

moral. Inside the buildings<sup>48</sup>, then, away from the mud and in more “Somali” spaces (which were generally impeccable), pure Somaliness, cleanliness, and morality could be found.

It is this moral purity, and the relative autonomy<sup>49</sup> within these spaces that Somalis occupy and own (in spite of living in a host country) that allows Eastleigh to become a place where people can live in a truly moral way. It is also why Somalis throughout the diaspora, but particularly those living in Western countries, behave differently when in Eastleigh and why frequently they send their children to Eastleigh for months at a time.

### **The Polluted Dibad and a Polluted City**

The word in Somali most often used to talk about the abroad, *dibad*, literally means outside, out of doors, or external. Though Arabic-based words such as *gurba*, and slang terms such as *Mareykanka* (the America) that lump the entire abroad together are also in circulation, *dibad* is the most frequently used. Unlike the other words, however, *dibad* has a very specific definition that does not necessarily hinge on explicitly national lines; some countries are considered *dibad* while others are not. *Dibad* refers to all non-Muslim, non-African countries in which Somalis now reside. *Dibad* is, therefore, the United States, Canada, Scandinavia, Great Britain and other parts of Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. Interestingly, *dibad* is also South Africa. In casual conversations about

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<sup>48</sup> There was a stunning contrast between the streets and inside buildings and compounds. Most residential compounds I visited were cleaned at least twice a week, top to bottom, and all of the homes I visited were cleaned daily. There were also strict rules about leaving one’s shoes outside homes. Further, most of the schools, businesses, religious centers and mosques were privately owned or managed by Somalis so once you entered through the doors, you left Kenyan policies behind.

<sup>49</sup> Autonomy ironically gained because of the Kenyan government’s blatant inattention and ignorance of Eastleigh other than during periodic police raids.

this, people emphasized the role of Islam in each of these societies – and the freedom (and state-wide encouragement) individuals have to practice their faith.

*Dibad* is simultaneously a place for potential infection/degradation and an opportunity for locating the means for providing positively to other Somalis living around the world thereby reinforcing and strengthening one's faith (and moral citizenship). Although most people will acknowledge the benefits of moving to *dibad*, and indeed there is a broad, intense desire to do so by Somalis, *dibad* also represents enormous potential for pollution for Somalis living in Eastleigh. Stereotypes about the morally infected nature of *dibad* countries and their citizens rely on racialized, moralized and sexualized discourses about non-Muslims which emphasize, among other things, the abandonment of families in favor of the individual and individual desires, the hyper-sexualized women (and to a certain extent men) who enjoy and seek out not only premarital sex, but specific kinds of sex, drunkenness, anti-faith/anti-religious belief and practice, and even basic bodily cleanliness.

In *dibad* countries, parents are also not allowed to properly discipline their children due in large part to their perceptions and understandings of formal state laws and policies that protect children from corporeal punishment. There is a popular song in Eastleigh and in the Dadaab refugee camp, commonly referred to as the “9-1-1 song,” in which a mother laments her inability to properly discipline and raise her children. In the United States, according to this song, the children are told that they can call 911 at any time they are feeling threatened or unsafe. The mother in the song frets that she can no longer punish her children because they can call 911 and tell the police that they are

being abused. She worries that now she is stuck between needing to discipline her children to raise them properly, and not wanting them to be taken away from her.

But by far the biggest sign of the potential for moral pollution in the abroad is related to the common belief that people cannot practice their faith properly in a non-Muslim country, particularly in the US. Many people believe that if they even try to go a mosque for Friday prayers, they would be targeted by the FBI for having connections to radical Islam and Al-Qaeda. Because *dibad* countries offer no perceived easy means of actually doing the ethical work of filling one's iman, at least in the popular imaginary, individuals are much more likely to go astray while there. And so children and adults alike return to Eastleigh.

Eastleigh is also, in many ways, seen by Somalis as a moral mecca in an immoral Nairobi and as such, individuals living there pay very close attention to those Somalis who do not live in Eastleigh, but who go there to shop or to visit family and friends. One of the first days I spent in Eastleigh, I was there with two Somali men, Nuruddin and Ahmed, translators who worked in one of the refugee processing organizations based in Nairobi, two young Somali girls, and one American woman. Although I had intended on spending the day walking around Eastleigh with Nuruddin, during our conversation over coffee that morning the American woman, Terri, called him and invited him to join her for Ethiopian food in Eastleigh later that day. Because we were already on our way, and because I am particularly fond of Ethiopian food, I agreed to change our plans slightly.

After lunch in a tiny restaurant located at the back of a building on one of the smaller side-streets off of First Avenue, we walked toward the main market area of Eastleigh where we would catch our matatu back to the city center after Terri did a little

shopping. As she charged ahead, determined to find the perfect scarf, I lagged behind with Ahmed, Nuruddin, and the two girls. The older of the two girls, Rahma, who was about 14 years old at the time, was wearing a long skirt and a long-sleeved pink shirt. She had her hair braided in tight rows, but left it and her neck uncovered. As we approached the Towfiq market, which I would learn is one of the more conservative<sup>50</sup> markets in Eastleigh, an old woman approached Rahma yelling. She touched Rahma's neck and face with her hand as if she were roughly smearing something on her skin. Spitting out her words, the old woman shamed Rahma. She demanded to know why Rahma was dressed like a Christian whore. Why did not she cover her hair or body in a properly modest way? She told Rahma that her mother was a bad woman for letting her dress in such a way. Rahma started to cry. Ahmed, who was carrying Rahma's 7 year-old sister, intervened, and respectfully asked the old woman to stop yelling. The old woman was undeterred; she continued to bellow shame at Rahma. Nuruddin suggested to Ahmed that we collect Terri, who was still shopping, and leave Eastleigh before the scene escalated.

A few days later, I learned from Rahma's mother, Ruqiya, that after we left Eastleigh that day the old woman reported Rahma's offense to Ruqiya's kin. Ruqiya's extended family frequently had problems with the ways Ruqiya allowed her daughters to dress and they disapproved of the fact that she did not live in Eastleigh near them. When I asked Rahma later about the event, she squirmed; she did not want to talk about it. She told me that the old lady was just crazy<sup>51</sup>. She also told me that she would not go back into Eastleigh without veiling.

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<sup>50</sup> By conservative, I mean that in this mall the majority of the women who worked there were Aqwaani.

<sup>51</sup> By saying that the old woman was "just crazy," Rahma was trying to dismiss the whole event and avoid talking about it. She did, as I state above, however, change her behavior in response to the experience.

This kind of attention to dress and behavior, motivated both by individual desires for ethical personhood as well as to conform to social norms and ideals, is not only undertaken by those living in or close to Eastleigh, but is also important to those individuals living in the rest of the abroad. In the next section I will show how people living in *dibadka* interrogate ideas and ideals of morality and ethical behavior as they interact with people once they return to Eastleigh, as well as how and why they choose to return to Eastleigh semi-permanently after being resettled out of Africa.

### **Re-making Somalis in Eastleigh**

The last time I flew to Nairobi via London I had a very long layover. To occupy my time, I did a lot of people-watching. By the time they announced the gate for my flight, I was wrinkled, crabby, and very tired. The waiting area for the flight began to fill. All the usuals were there: twelve or so nervous teenage missionaries wearing matching t-shirts being corralled by a kind looking older couple; three European or American families prematurely prepared in head-to-toe khaki and hiking boots for safari; a few British Kenyan families looking chic in their linen and scarves; at least two Kenyan-Indian families eating food they packed at home; some loner journalist/aid worker types looking confident, weathered and bored; a few well-dressed Kenyans returning home for a visit; and of course, at least five Somali families.

I watched two of the Somali families, who appeared to be traveling together, for a while. There were four adult women in the group. The youngest of these women was very quiet and stood holding an adorable toddler boy who was interested in everything except being held by her. She wore a modest dress and headscarf, but was not wearing

the thick *jilbaab* or *shuko* (*buibui*) that is common in Nairobi. Two of the women, most likely the mothers of the various children, were stunning. Their long, fitted, beautifully embroidered skirts and fitted blouses flattered their tall figures. They both walked around bare-footed in high-heeled strappy sandals; they wore colorful scarves tightly fitted around their hair and a second, sheer scarf draped softly over their heads and shoulders. Both of these women had tastefully shaped eyebrows, eye makeup, lipliner and lipstick, fashionably large gold jewelry, and they all smelled of the sweet, musky perfume of which Somali women are quite fond. They chatted loudly with one another while they sorted through the various bags of food and clothing they were bringing. Their husbands, both dressed in slightly over-sized business suits, paced in the background while talking loudly on their cell phones. One elderly woman sat quietly beside one of the strollers. She was dressed modestly in a simple *dirac*, the traditional Somali attire now mostly worn at weddings and other functions. Each of the five small children in the group delighted in making eye contact and grinning at people in the waiting area; the little boy punctuated every achievement of eye contact with a loud squeal, which he repeated because of the laughter it earned him every time.

Coincidentally, both families sat across the aisle from me on the plane. Once on board, the fathers, who were not seated with the women and the children, unwrapped their headphones, put them on, and settled in with their books and magazines. The women seemed to leave most of the direct responsibility for the children to the younger woman. After concluding that the little boy's squeals were far less amusing on the plane, I returned to my own book and began attending to my own strategies toward achieving comfort and sleep on the long flight.

Eight hours later, when we were about to land in Nairobi and the cabin lights were turned on for the last time, those two gorgeously dressed and adorned Somali women I had admired in London were now wearing head-to-toe thick, dark colored *jilbaabs*. They had removed all their makeup. Both now wore black socks under their sandals. Their bracelets were still visible though their earrings were now hidden behind the thick headscarf; and the tighter of the initial scarves were visible only at the forehead. Their transformations were impressive. As we left the plane, one of the women hoisted her little boy onto her hip and did not put him down until we had left the baggage area where she handed him over to some relatives waiting for them in the arrival hall.

Of course not all Somali women travelling from the UK to Kenya transform their appearances like this. Nevertheless, I believe this illustrates an awareness and attention to the ethical work undertaken by Somali women to adhere to the ethical responsibilities placed on Somalis when they are in Eastleigh, here if only most obvious in terms of dress: responsibilities that are far more conservative, perhaps, than in many places throughout the Diaspora from which these individuals come.

These Somali women on the airplane were aware of their responsibilities to dress modestly and moreover were aware of how “modest” is defined differently in Eastleigh than it is in Great Britain. By changing their dress, these women were sartorially acknowledging and respecting the symbolic power Eastleigh (and the norms created there) has over definitions and standards for authentic or pure Somaliness, or, as I argue throughout this dissertation, the power Eastleigh has in the creations and definitions of Somali morality and ethical behavior.



Eastleigh was not only the place where individuals *would* change their behavior, but it also was one in some ways a place symbolically and imaginatively constructed *to* change someone's behavior. It was the destination – a place where parents and others could count on the didactic aspects of the moral personhood of those living there.

### **Sending the kids back to Eastleigh**

One day, after a full day of interviews and visits, Osop and I went to a local shop so I could buy curtain hooks. We entered a shop on First Avenue tucked behind a large stack of single foam mattresses. A woman and a young man were inside; she sat on a stool behind a counter of sorts and he stood, leaning against the wall. “*Karibu*<sup>52</sup>,” she said. “Salaam Aleykum.” I greeted them in Arabic. They replied wearing looks of curiosity. We chatted for a few minutes before I told them what I needed. While the young man fetched the curtain hooks, a boy, approximately 10 years old, entered.

The boy wore a pristine white robe and a red and white checked scarf over his head. His wide grin revealed braces. He was the first Somali child I had seen with braces. “*Waa la wanaagsanyahay*,” I greeted him in Somali. Wide-eyed and after exhaling, “*Walaahi*,” he asked me in perfect English where I was from. He spoke with a thick American accent. He was from Minnesota; he was born there. He told me that he was in Eastleigh for the summer to go to school, to help the family a bit in their business, and to live with and get to know his grandparents. Mostly, though, he was in Eastleigh because it was where his parents believed he could learn about and practice his faith. The woman in the shop interrupted him. “It is important these young people come back here to learn

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<sup>52</sup> Karibu (Swahili): Welcome.

about their faith and their culture. It is important that they don't forget their family or their language." She smiled at the boy as she handed me my change.

Over the course of my fieldwork, I met and saw (and heard) many young people who were sent to Eastleigh to be what I (and my field assistants) jokingly referred to as "re-Somalified." When I asked people why they were sent to Eastleigh and not, for instance, sent to a Middle Eastern country like Saudi Arabia, I was most often told that although Saudi Arabia is a good place, Eastleigh was where the Somalis were; it was where their families are. Here, 40-year-old Safiya illustrates this:

The abroad<sup>53</sup> has good and bad sides. The problem with the abroad is that the people there want to use your children against you and control you through your kids. In some cases they can even take your kids away. Some of these kids don't pray. Over there in America, the CIA is watching the mosques so people fear going there and in the schools, they don't let their children dress modestly or cover their hair. They say that if they want to attend the school, they can't dress like proper Muslims. That is terrible. It is very easy for the children to go astray there.

People send their kids back to Eastleigh to gain their culture back. For example, to know more about religion, culture, and to go to school. In the abroad, they have too much freedom. Here they don't have time to move up and down. Here parents can give the best education and they know when the child goes to school. The child goes to school and then has to come home in the evening.

Culture is the culture of the parents. For instance in the abroad they are creating a border between the mother and child with different cultures. Our culture is to obey and follow the rules. It is because of the relatives. It is what the family used to do and how to behave.

Safiya does not personally have children who live abroad. Her seven children all live with her in her small apartment in a residential building in one of the quieter blocks of Eastleigh. Nevertheless, she is aware of the dangers of going abroad for young people.

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<sup>53</sup> Note that the abroad, here, is not referring to Saudi Arabia or any countries in the Middle East.

Forty year-old Anisa agrees. Although her husband is currently living in Minnesota and she laments being separated from him, she also asserted that the abroad is a dangerous place for the young people.

The children are sent to Eastleigh to be disciplined, to gain more knowledge about the religion. They come so they don't lose their culture. In Europe and America the kids can do anything they want. You can't cane your kid. We do that to straighten them up.

And as Maryan, a divorced woman in her late twenties explains:

They send their kids to Eastleigh because of the culture. The kids abroad can forget their culture too easily. They are sent here to learn more about their language, culture and religion. In the abroad, you can find an 18-year-old kid who doesn't know anything about language or culture. Language and Religion are the most important. Mostly the kids from abroad don't know how to talk to their parents with respect. Those abroad don't study as hard as they do here – both in the public and in the private schools. For example, the ones abroad can say anything to a teacher or even sleep in class. The schools are tougher here.

The schools around Eastleigh were particularly important for Somalis. Because many people lack the proper legal resident permits, Somali refugees living in Eastleigh have often found it difficult to enroll their children in the Kenyan public schools. While I was there, the Kenyan government initiated a free primary school education program to enable even the poorest families to send their children to primary school (at least in theory). Although this policy has helped some Somali families, many children are still excluded. The Somali private schools on the other hand, were open to children, with or without papers, who wanted to get both a secular and a religious education. The teachers at these schools prepared their students not only for the Kenyan national standardized tests but also in Qur'anic education.

One day, Osop and I were walking past one of the newer of these schools just as class was being let out for lunch. Sisters, housegirls, and other women waited with canisters of tea and plastic containers of food outside the tall, green, metal gates for the children to emerge. Dozens of girls and boys ran past us in matching outfits; even the tiniest of the girls wore a little green jilbaab. At one point a chubby boy, probably ten years old or so, exited the gate and, seeing me, came to an abrupt stop. He stared at me. Osop and I had run into our friend, Fauzia, who was bringing lunch to her nieces and nephews. We were chatting as the kids ate. The chubby boy slowly approached our little group. He had spilled orange Fanta on the front of his uniform shirt and his shoes were unpolished. He drew closer and was within earshot when I said something to Fauzia. With a gasp, he shouted at his friend who stood several yards away from us, “Dude! She speaks English! I think she is American, too!”

Osop and I chuckled and I turned toward the boy. I asked him where he was from. “Ohio,” he whispered, suddenly very shy. I asked him why he was in Eastleigh. He shrugged. I asked him if he went to this school (even though I had just seen him walk out and he was wearing its’ uniform). He nodded. I asked him if this was the first time he had been to Eastleigh. He shook his head. Osop and Fauzia encouraged him. Do you like Eastleigh, I asked him. Finally speaking again, he told me he thought it was dirty. I laughed. I asked him if he liked going to school here. It is hard, he told me. He also told me that he was sent back every summer and that at some point in the future, his parents may send him to live with his family here for a couple years to go to school. I asked him if he wanted to do that. He shrugged. Terminating our brief conversation, the headmaster

of the school started calling all the students back to class. The little boy jumped up, exhaled the word “bye,” and ran inside the gate.

Later that afternoon, Osop and I sat down with the headmaster of this school, the Al-Ansur academy, to ask him about private schools in Eastleigh and about who attended his school. He told me that although it is mostly Somalis who attended his school, anyone was welcome. There were already a few non-Somali students in the classes, he said. He assured me that if a non-Muslim student enrolled she would not have to go to the Qur’anic studies class, but would take a different class instead. The school was better, he believed, than the public schools because it did not depend on the government for supplies or resources<sup>54</sup>. He also explained that because it was private, he could admit students without the paperwork verifying their legal resident status as long as the tuition fees could be paid; students visiting for holidays could also enroll for short periods of time.

Children were being sent back to Eastleigh on a regular basis because their parents want them to attend school, learn the Somali language, culture and religion, and become reacquainted with their families. Importantly, I believe, the people hosting these children had equally strong feelings about why they needed to come and they took the project of disciplining and training these children very seriously (even if they quietly found the children’s behavior and weakness somewhat amusing).

In a conversation with Amina, the mother of three teenaged children and the co-owner of a small shop in the market, she told me how her sister, Zahra, like many mothers living abroad, decided that her son needed to spend some time living in

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<sup>54</sup> It was a well-established trope in Kenya that the government unevenly supported the various public schools.

Eastleigh. Amina agreed to host him. He was only an infant when his mother took him to the United Kingdom, so he was not accustomed to life in Eastleigh. “He hates it here,” Amina told me, laughing, after I asked her how he was doing. I asked her why. She told me how he thought Eastleigh was filthy, that there were too many demands placed on him at home and at school, and that he had become frustrated because people laughed at his Somali language skills all the time. But worst of all, according to Amina, was that he could not handle the living and sleeping arrangements. “He started complaining almost immediately when he found out he would be sharing not just a room, but a bed with his cousin, and that they would be sleeping on a mattress on the floor.” She joked with Osop and me about how people living abroad do not have any tolerance for or ability to suffer; they were too accustomed to being comfortable. I asked her how long her nephew would be staying. She laughed again. “Oh, he is staying for three months, but he has already moved into one of the hotels nearby, which always has running water and electricity. He will learn.”

Similarly amusing to Somalis from Eastleigh was watching older teenagers return to Eastleigh after spending several years in *dibad*. One late afternoon, Maryan and I hopped on an old number 9 matatu heading back to Center city. In spite of how uncool<sup>55</sup> we looked getting onto the dilapidated bus, I often liked riding on the older ones at the end of each day. The music was never very loud, if there was even a functional sound system, and these matatus were usually much less crowded. Much to my relief, Maryan

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<sup>55</sup> Most of the young Somalis I knew would wait for a long time, often letting several other matatus pass them, to board the matatu that would give them the most symbolic capital.

and Osop always humored me when I wanted to take the old-fashioned<sup>56</sup> matatus. Shortly after we sat down, the matatu stopped again and two young men boarded. They looked like they had been peeled out of the catalogue for a department store's hip-hop fashion line. One of them wore gray sweatpants, an oversized white polo shirt, and bright white sneakers. He had a baseball hat on backwards turned slightly to one side. He wore gold necklaces and did not remove his sunglasses when he got on the bus. His friend was wearing a pair of baggy jeans and a red polo shirt. He wore no hat, no jewelry, and no sunglasses. They swaggered to seats at the back of the matatu. I glanced at Maryan. She grinned. "I think they got on the wrong matatu, Maryan," I told her. She laughed out loud. "Yeah, they should be on one of those that is very loud." We both sat back and commenced listening to what they were saying<sup>57</sup>.

The young man with the sweatpants was talking about how much he had spent on his sneakers. "A hundred twenty dollars, yo." He continued in the same vein. He suspected that the police would think he was in a gang because of his sunglasses. His friend agreed. He replied, "Whatever man. If the police stop me to look at my ID card or something just because I am Somali and they will want to shoot me because I am in a gang, I will just show them my passport and they will have to respect me and let me be." He took out an American passport from the back pocket of his jeans. In spite of speaking in a combination of Swahili and Somali, he peppered his dialogue with various urban American colloquialisms including "goddamn" and when referring to the man who sold him the shoes he referred to him as "that nigga." When they got off the matatu a few

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<sup>56</sup> By old-fashioned, I am juxtaposing this quiet, unadorned, older matatu with one of the more fancy matatus like the one I describe in the beginning of this chapter. Typically, if you were young and trendy, you would not want to be seen on such an old-fashioned matatu.

<sup>57</sup> It would have been difficult not to listen to them on this nearly empty, silent matatu.

stops before ours, and strutted down the street, Maryan could not stop laughing at them. “They are going to get mugged in no time. Why would he carry around his passport,” Maryan demanded to know. “Sometimes the kids from abroad just don’t have any common sense,” she stated.

This idea that children coming from abroad do not have common sense came up frequently over the course of the research. In Maryan’s statement above, it meant only that this young man did not have the street smarts necessary for survival without being mugged in Nairobi. Simply put, this young man was attracting a lot of attention to himself and would easily become a target among pickpockets and thieves on the street; flashing his passport around only increased this attention. Moreover, the perception that children who are coming to Eastleigh from abroad lack common sense also indexes something deeper than simply street smarts. It points to the pollution of the abroad and the fact that children who spend most of their lives living in certain countries abroad will not know right from wrong in a common sense kind of way.

But making Eastleigh into a moral center is not only about shame and discipline. It is also about celebration and rituals. Anthropologists have talked about the role of ritual in making morality for many years (c.f. Rappaport 1999). Channeling Rappaport, Michael Lambek points out that “ritual projects moral intentions and relations, establishing conditions in terms of which, as Rappaport argues, events are to be judged instead of the reverse” (Lambek 2000:315). Although Lambek reminds us that “performatively established morality is not restricted to highly marked, decisive events,” (2000:315), to close this chapter about how Eastleigh is mapped at the center of a global moral geography, I am going to talk about a wedding.



I choose this particular wedding because I believe it captures many of the ways Somali morality is being discussed, performed and constructed in Eastleigh. First, the wedding took place in a community center that served the Somali community in Eastleigh in various ways. It was a location for Somalis to air complaints (to other Somalis), to listen to public sermons and debates,<sup>58</sup> and in the evenings it was often used as a space for people to throw parties and weddings. As a Somali space, even at night, it was a safe space<sup>59</sup>. The wedding also provided a place, as I will show, where Somali morality was constructed and at least temporarily redefined.

I suggest that celebrations like this wedding become places where newly moralized kin relationships between women across clan-family lines gain public social legitimacy and reinforce the perception of a unified Somaliness in a way that is not limited to the structural functional alliance between two groups through the individuals getting married. The presence and performance of all the women throughout the ceremony contribute to the project of constructing a coherent, unified idealized Somaliness.

**Weddings rituals and morality:** *“Life begins with bismillah. So do weddings.”*

I believe that like other rituals, weddings are important sites for moral world reimaginings. One day as I was sitting in Fadumo’s market stall, she announced to me that I would attend a wedding that was taking place the following Friday. It was my first Somali wedding.

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<sup>58</sup> At least weekly, there were public debates about religion (usually Christianity vs. Islam), politics, and other issues.

<sup>59</sup> Eastleigh could get very dangerous at night. There were nightly shootings, carjackings, raids, and thugs tended to roam in and out of Eastleigh and the neighboring estates and communities.

After I arrived at her apartment on the day of the wedding, she chose from her collection a gold *dirac* (dress) with purple and white flowers, a purple headscarf and a shawl that matched the cloth in the *dirac* for me to wear. After putting on the *dirac*, Fadumo smiled slightly, then turned and commenced dressing herself. She wore a glorious, bright orange *dirac* and matching headscarf and shawl. Next, she put on large gold earrings, several gold necklaces, bracelets, and rings. She completed the process by putting on lipstick and face powder<sup>60</sup>, and then using several different vials she spread perfume all over her skin and clothing.

We took a taxi to a building where the wedding was taking place. When we entered the large hall, there were hundreds of folding chairs facing a stage, which was decorated with streamers and balloons. In front of the stage was a large open, carpeted area. On both sides of the carpeted area were more chairs. Nearly a hundred women were already present. Among the women sitting on the left side of the room was one woman with a microphone and another with a drum. When we walked in, we were directed to sit on the right side, opposite the drummer and woman with the microphone. As this was the women's celebration, the only men present were the cameramen and the DJ, who was setting up for the party that would follow this *buraanbur* ceremony.

The woman<sup>61</sup> with the microphone began singing and the woman with the drum began playing. The woman sang a series of phrases, and during each sequence a different group of women would dance to the carpet, give a gift (usually American dollars or a

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<sup>60</sup> Weddings were the only times when paying that much attention to one's appearance and wearing makeup was socially acceptable for the women I spent time with in Eastleigh.

<sup>61</sup> I later found out that the woman was actually reciting a variety of poems, including those that honored each of the clan-families represented, those that celebrate the unity and perfection of Islam, and those that praised the Somali nation.

headscarf), then stay in front dancing until a series of repetitive drum beats ended the refrain. As the sequence repeated, I was told that the singer was calling representatives of different clan-families to the front of the room. After over an hour of the singing and dancing, the music changed abruptly and all the women started singing. When I asked Fadumo about this, she told me that every lady there was Somali and they were all celebrating together as one. As they sang, the women clapped their hands and embraced each other. Then the regular music began again and the ceremony continued. Later in the celebration, the music stopped again for the women to say their evening prayers. The appearance of one-ness among all the women was striking during these moments in which they acted in unison. When they sang and when they performed their evening prayers, however, the only person in the room who was not participating was me.

A couple of days after the wedding, Fadumo invited me to her home to watch videos of other parties and weddings. Somali women hire videographers to record weddings and other celebrations and parties. The films are then edited with Somali music and poetry dubbed into the beginning and end. As we chatted and watched the videos both Fadumo and her sister, Anab, took turns interrupting each other and the film to tell me about something they thought I should know about Somali “culture”.

Well documented in anthropological literature is that people highlight different loyalties and memberships depending on the social context (see Scott 1985; 1992). Drawing from this literature, it makes sense that Somali women negotiate their competing loyalties to clan and nation. If the construction of a pan-Somali national identity is as important as contemporary public discourse in Somali communities suggests, it makes sense that women would also privilege this discourse of Somali

oneness in venues such as weddings. More so, as the large-scale project of moral world rebuilding is undertaken throughout Eastleigh in response to the massive moral crisis, weddings can serve as collective performances of moral unity and productivity.

Weddings are not new events in Somali social life. Neither is the practice of forging alliances between two different groups through marriage unions. Indeed, phrases such as “We marry our enemies,” which according to some Somali studies scholars were quite common in the past, clearly indicate the emphasis on the union between two groups, which was established symbolically through the marriage (Afrax 1994; Ahmed 2004).

By including specific songs and poems that emphasizing the presence of different clan families unified in celebration, and giving gifts of American dollars<sup>62</sup>, which might signify the Somalis living in the US and in other diasporic settings, weddings become symbolically significant in transnational moral world rebuilding projects. The act of praying collectively in the middle of the wedding, while again not something otherwise out of the ordinary, in this context further socially legitimizes the performance of Somali oneness and accumulates powerful political resonance in a socio-political context in which factionalism remains an enormous hurdle to the Somali peace and unification process. Because each of these components takes place in a women’s wedding celebration, the spaces become gendered public spaces of political participation and action. Finally, because this wedding takes place in Eastleigh, and because it is viewed as better and more authentic than weddings filmed in various parts of the abroad, Eastleigh is ritually created as a moral place and the people in the room participating in the ceremony were realizing their own moral subjectivities.

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<sup>62</sup> At other weddings, other currency, including Euros, Kroner, Riyal and so on, were also exchanged.

## Discussion and Conclusions

Eastleigh is, for Somalis living and visiting there, a symbolically significant location and as I have said throughout this chapter, is one that has been mapped into a transnational Somali moral geography. Ironically this is done in spite of it being a neighborhood of Nairobi, Kenya, and despite the fact that due to radical infrastructural deficiencies it is filthy and physically polluted, it is viewed as a morally pure Somali space. It is a place where children and adults are sent or return from *dibadka* to be work on their faiths, to learn about their family, country, and religion, and importantly, as I have tried to show in this chapter, to work on their ethical responsibilities of personhood.

I also have tried to show that in making Eastleigh into “Little Mogadishu,” even if they are still waiting and hoping to be resettled to another country, people living there can build a future that is both moral and Somali. Moreover, I believe that this has facilitated people’s ability to manage the insecurity of life characteristic of one in exile, one that is illegal, and one that is happening amidst filth and poverty.

Now that I have offered a background into the context of the Somali metaethical project, and why I believe it can and is happening in Eastleigh, I will now turn to the more personal and individualized attempts to define and prove ethical personhood. In the next chapter, “Possessing Morality,” I will discuss how people work on filling their own *iman*<sup>63</sup>, and through these actions perform their own morality. In this next chapter, I also return to the debate I raised in both the introduction and in Chapter 2, between different groups of Muslims in Eastleigh. Possessing morality is, as I will show, also a source of great debate and contention, and this debate is proving very important to people living in

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<sup>63</sup> *Iman*, or faith, is conceptualized by Somalis as a reservoir that requires constant ethical/pious attention in order that it remains strong or “heavy.” I discuss this at length in the following chapter.

Eastleigh. Determining which rituals of devotion and piety are signs of morality or, conversely, unethical behavior, is at the heart of this debate and has become politically and symbolically significant.

## 4. Possessing Morality

### Introduction

As I stated at the end of the last chapter, in this chapter, I explore some of the ways Eastleigh Somalis “possess” morality. As I briefly discussed in the introductory Chapter of this dissertation, a person’s faith, or iman, was often described to me as a sort of well or reservoir often imagined as residing in a person’s body, which requires constant attention. To keep one’s iman full, one has to attend daily to his or her ethical and religious obligations. There was, as I discuss here, however, a rather contentious debate within the Eastleigh community about which devotional practices were considered ethical.

In this chapter, I explore the various, and often contradictory, ways Somali individuals living in Eastleigh understand, accumulate, and perform their faith and morality. I will begin this chapter with this story about the *sixirlo*<sup>64</sup>, not because I will be pursuing an analysis of witchcraft or sorcery<sup>65</sup>, but to emphasize and introduce the very real and important relationships people have with the spirit world as well as how they live, experience and practice morality and faith. I began with the *sixirlo*, rather, because while many people claimed to know (or have heard of) individuals who sought their

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<sup>64</sup> Sixirlo is the Somali word for what Osop and others translated as “witchdoctor.”

<sup>65</sup> For discussions of witchcraft and sorcery see Evans-Pritchard (1937); Malinowski (1922); Kluckhohn (1944); Douglas (1963); Turner (1964); Gescheiere (1997). There is of course a long history of analysis of witchcraft and sorcery in East Africa in particular.

services, no one would ever personally admit to consulting one as it was particularly morally reprehensible. Participating in such practices was believed by most people I talked to as *shirk*,<sup>66</sup> and while certain groups within Somali society maintained some level of interaction with the jinn (either in terms of exorcizing them or of feeding them to pacify them), worshipping them or asking them to intervene on one's behalf was bad and, as in the case above, could be dangerous.

In this chapter I will discuss some of the different elements of the Islamic tradition called on by Somalis in their discussions, debates, and performances of morality in Eastleigh and how some individuals changed their manner of invoking Islam over the course of the time I was living there. These changes were and are not all-encompassing and there is no general consensus about what is moral or proper, but the metaethical project itself can be seen in the debates about and criticisms of the different paths and practices people follow, which I will highlight in the subsequent pages. Perhaps the most striking and visible debate among the Somalis in Eastleigh, and one that seemed to change somewhat over time, concerned the trend to switch from following Sufism<sup>67</sup> or following a more conservative path, what they call Aqwaanism/Salafism<sup>68 69</sup>.

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<sup>66</sup> *Shirk* refers to the (incorrect and morally impure) belief in polytheism or practices that imply directing one's entreaties at a spiritual being other than God.

<sup>67</sup> By this, I mean am referring to individuals who practice certain rituals and forms of worship typically associated with Sufism (specifically *dhikr* and saint worship)

<sup>68</sup> Toward the beginning of my research, I never heard the word Salafism. I heard, instead, the word Wahhabism was employed, and typically in a derogatory way. The individuals themselves were regularly called Wahhabis (again, perjoratively) but those who followed this path referred to themselves as Aqwaanis.

<sup>69</sup> I want, also, to point out that these were local organic categories employed on the ground by Somalis to describe individuals who engage in certain devotional practices and rituals. I do not wish to create a dichotomy between Sufis and Sunnis, for all Somalis are Sunni. These categories were locally constructed and as such I use them in the way that Somalis in Eastleigh did.



## **Sixirlo/Sixirley and Morality**

Osop and I were meeting an elderly Sufi woman for lunch one day when we saw a small cardboard sign nailed to a telephone pole that read “Dr. Sheikh Yahya” and then listed his phone number. In the previous weeks, I had been interviewing several people about their own etiologies of health and their healing strategies. I was excited about talking to someone who I thought was both biomedically and spiritually trained. I asked Osop if she had heard of Dr. Sheikh Yahya. She told me she hadn’t, but she recorded his number and promised to call to set up an appointment for us to talk with him.

A week or so later, Osop and I were plodding through Eastleigh to find our doctor’s office. We got lost. After a few phone calls, the doctor’s assistant met us on the side of the road opposite one of Eastleigh’s largest trash dumps, near Section 3, which is the only predominantly non-Somali part of the estate. As we waited, both Osop and I assumed we would meet an elderly Somali man. To our initial surprise, the person approaching us looked neither like a sheikh (or a sheikh in training) nor Somali. He was a smallish, young Kenyan man wearing a purple button-down dress shirt, pressed slacks, and meticulously polished black pointy-toed dress shoes. I kidded with Osop as he approached that we should probably run away because he was clearly not Somali and we clearly were. She giggled and we powered forward. The man greeted us in Swahili and instructed us to follow him. He said nothing else.

Ignoring our attempts to ask him questions and staying at least five feet ahead of us the entire time, he led us through various side and back streets in Eastleigh’s sections three and two until we entered a very dirty compound quite near a large garage. I had not seen a compound like it yet. Although Eastleigh itself is filthy and the stench from the

raw sewage lining many of the streets can make a person's eyes water, I had never seen the *inside* of a Somali compound with so much waste. We walked down a narrow hallway, passing a few shops selling biscuits, cooking oil and laundry soap. In spite of the little shops, based on the laundry hanging in the corridor and the curtains on the windows, it seemed that this was primarily a residential compound. The odors from the trash and sewage were almost overpowering. As we neared the end of the corridor, the smell of marijuana became just as concentrated. The man in the purple shirt stopped at the beaded door at the end of the hallway, removed his shoes, added them to the rather large pile on the mat next to the door and entered. We followed suit.

It was a very dark, smoky room. A small battery-powered radio crackled next to a lit candle on a small table. Several sticks of incense burned in the corner though they did little to mask the odor of marijuana in the room. The electricity was out again, so we would be doing this interview in the relative dark. Unlike what happened during other blackout interviews, neither Dr. Yahya nor his assistant offered to leave a door or window open. I can honestly say I was unsure whether I would have preferred them have remained open or closed. Osop and I sat on a loveseat opposite a very old man reclined in a tattered armchair. The man in the purple shirt sat stiffly on a stool beside him. He offered no greeting to the old man and did little to acknowledge our presence. To my left, there was another room with the door slightly ajar. There was at least one person inside, but I could not initially see what they were doing. All the windows in the tiny room we sat in were covered with thick, deep red curtains.

Without turning the radio down, and with his eyes closed, Dr. Sheikh Yahya asked Osop in Swahili what we wanted from him. I started explaining who I was in

Swahili but was cut off with a wave of his hand. He repeated his question. Osop repeated what I had just said. She explained who I was, what I was doing in Eastleigh and that I was interested in his work with Somali women and men. He curtly told us that yes, he helped Somali women with various things, but, and then opening his eyes ever so slightly, he asked us what we wanted from him. He added that he could help me with *my* problems. If I would like to go in that back room, he said, gesturing toward the room to my left, then he could treat me and help solve my problems. Osop and I both insisted again that we were not there for treatment and that, as Osop had told him on the phone when she called, we just wanted to talk to him. At this point, someone in the other room bumped the door fully open. Two young men were sorting a pile of something dark into what looked like film canisters. Through the corner of my eye I saw one of the boys look up at us and then without hesitation or being directed to do so by Dr. Yahya, he slammed the door shut.

Unsatisfied with our answers, and with detectable impatience, Dr. Sheikh Yahya pressed us to tell him what malady we needed his help to treat. Rather than argue with him further, we asked him what kinds of problems he was able to fix. He listed several: jinn, evil eye, an inability to eat, insomnia, and unrequited love. Osop asked him how he helped these people suffering from these problems; how did he help people who suffered from the ill-effects of jinn, for example<sup>70</sup>? I felt her stiffen beside me as she asked him this question. He explained nonchalantly that he would consult with the jinn and send some of those jinn he worked with to attack the source of the person's problem, whether

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<sup>70</sup> I knew that she was particularly interested in how to treat the jinn because of her own family member's struggle to overcome the jinn who had troubled them for many years. I will go into more detail about her family later in the chapter.

it was another person, a thing, or another jinn. Osop clarified that he used the jinn to solve people's problems; the old man nodded.

Without looking at me, Osop jumped to her feet, thanked the two men for their time and explained that she just realized what time it was and that we had another meeting in Garissa (the mall) in ten minutes. She politely told them that we would call them to set up another meeting if we had any more questions. She grabbed my arm and hastily told me under her breath, "We are outta' here, Anna." Following Osop's abrupt leave, I rose, thanked them and moved toward the door. Osop had already put her sneakers on and was several feet away from the door by the time I passed through the beaded curtain again. I have never seen her move so quickly. For months she had teased me about walking too quickly, of forgetting that my legs are twice as long as hers, and of being unfairly impatient as she laced and double knotted her sneakers. This time I had to rush to catch up with her. We had both left the compound and rounded the corner before the man in the purple shirt had one of his shoes tied.

As we hustled down the street, Osop asked me whether I knew what a *sixirlo* was. I told her I did not. He was a witchdoctor<sup>71</sup>, she told me with an anxious grin on her face as we walked onto 1<sup>st</sup> avenue and headed toward the Amco mall where she wanted to consult her friend Amina, a woman who also attended Sheikh Ahmed's healing sessions. I had gathered that the visit made her uncomfortable, but I was interested in her response to him. Osop explained that if he was offended by our visit or hasty departure, he could send a jinn after us, simply because he knew our names. I asked her if she really thought that many Somali women sought help from him. Without hesitation, Osop told me yes, of

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<sup>71</sup> The term "witchdoctor" was what she chose to call him, in English.

course. She said that even more people sought help from the *sixirlo* now than before the war. People are suffering even more because of the war, she explained, and they are being fooled by these *sixirlo* (male) and *sixirley* (female). They think these *sixirlo* can offer quick solutions to their problems and they end up spending all their money and suffering because they are not being healed and they are losing their faith in the process, she elaborated. Osop giggled nervously as we rushed through the market to Amina's clothing shop.

When we arrived and told her where we had just been, she laughed out loud. She found it terribly amusing that we had been fooled by the sign, which claimed that Dr. Yahye was both a sheikh and a doctor. It was common knowledge, according to Amina, that the people who advertised in such a manner were not reputable sheikhs and certainly not doctors. We then had a long conversation about witchcraft and sorcery in Somali society more broadly and Amina told us stories about times when she was sent the evil eye by women jealous of her success in business and of her, now waning she lamented, beauty. The people who hire the *sixirlo* to solve their problems, she explained, did not want to put in the work required of their faith; they were not good people. They thought they could take a short-cut and could, instead of putting their trust in Allah to direct their paths, take control of their futures by enlisting the help of the jinn and those humans “in cahoots”<sup>72</sup> with the jinn.

In a later interview with Sheikh Ahmed, a Somali man who had gotten his Masters degree at the Islamic University of al-Madinah al-Munawarah in Saudi Arabia,

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<sup>72</sup> Osop used the English phrase “in cahoots” here.

and who ran healing sessions for Somali women in the area, he confirmed and elaborated on Amina's statements.

[The *sixirley*] are very dangerous. They can send illness and *shaytan* after anyone who goes to see them. They spread illness, may Allah hate them. If you would have told him your names, he might have sent [the *jinn*] after you. They are very dangerous. Very dangerous. The *shaytan* walk around, you see, and they walk around with the *qareen* and everyone has a *qareen* with them. When the *shaytan* walk with the *qareen*, the *qareen* tells them all about you. And so they cannot fail to find you. But the *sixirley* lack knowledge. They lack faith. But then the Somalis who practice witchcraft hide it. It is shameful among Somalis. Someone will do it [consult a *sixirlo*], but they will do it in secrecy. Somalis hate witchcraft and if they see a witch, Somalis like to kill them. Those among us who are clean hate it so much and so those who practice it are dirty and they must hide it. They pretend to be a sheikh to hide it. It is a person's *iman* that will protect them from the *jinn* and *shaytan*. So with the witchcraft and all these stinky things, it is your *iman* that protects you from it. It is your faith and your acknowledgement of Allah that protects you.

So although one needs to attend to their ethical and religious obligations, there are specific ideas about what constitutes the ethical and proper. Indeed, as is evident both in this story and as I will show later in this chapter, participating in actions that are deemed unethical or improper are dangerous.

In the next section, before turning to different devotional practices, I explain what it means to possess a full or heavy *iman*. I will also outline how people explain why this is important, and how significantly, how it is related to morality.

### **Possessing a Full or Heavy Iman**

The Somalis I talked to believe that it is the responsibility of good Somali Muslims to attend to the duties of their faith. Over the course of my research, I met with four sheikhs in Eastleigh, but spent most of my time talking to Sheikh Ahmed and Sheikh

Hussein. Sheikh Ahmed, a Sunni<sup>73</sup> sheikh and scholar who studied at Islamic University of al-Madinah al-Munawarah in Saudi Arabia, is a Sunni<sup>74</sup> Somali sheikh. He was a very well-respected Sheikh by my research assistants and the community in general. He was regularly consulted on issues of faith and practice, and several of the women I talked to and worked with went to his home to listen to Qur'anic recitation and/or to attend his healing sessions. Sheikh Ahmed, also Sunni, was a Sufi sheikh associated with one of the most prominent *dhikr* groups in Eastleigh. He was a member of the Qadiriyya *turuq*. Like Sheikh Ahmed, Sheikh Hussein was very well respected in Eastleigh, at least within the Sufi community. Nearly all of the Sufi women I met in Eastleigh recommended that I talk to him to understand more about the *dhikr* and other Sufi devotional practices.

According to both men, over the course of several interviews, they explained how there are twelve steps to achieving and establishing belief and if a person follows these twelve steps, she will receive forgiveness from Allah for any sins or wrongdoings she may commit; she will live a fulfilled and happy life; she can rely on Allah to take away or relieve her of the troubles (or the stress associated with these troubles) in life; and she lead a clean, healthy and contented life. These responsibilities are, according to Sheikh Ahmed and Sheikh Hussein<sup>75</sup>, separated into five pillars of physical piety, six responsibilities of the spirit, and Al-Ihsaan. The physical pillars include the statement of belief in Allah and Muhammad as his prophet, praying five salats a day, paying zakat or alms to charity, fasting during the month of Ramadan, and Hajj. The pillars of the spirit

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<sup>73</sup> Although he was reluctant to refer to himself throughout my research as an Aqwaani, he was adamantly opposed to practicing or participating in the *dhikr* and other such things, characteristic of those individuals who self-identifies as Sufi.

<sup>74</sup> In August 2011, I found out that Sheikh Hussein had been killed in an automobile accident in Eastleigh. Yahye, who told me about it, said the Sufi community in Eastleigh was devastated.

<sup>75</sup> I interviewed both men separately, several times, over the course of the time I was in Kenya.

include a belief in one God, Allah, the belief in Allah's angels, belief in the four books of the four prophets, the belief in all of the prophets as messengers of Allah (not Gods themselves), the belief in and recognition of Judgment Day and the belief that everything happens because of Allah has ordained it. The 12<sup>th</sup> responsibility of Muslims, Al-Ihsaan, is the understanding that a person should trust in Allah, accept his commandments, and behave with the knowledge that he is watching everyone all the time<sup>76</sup>.

Among the pillars, Somalis living in Eastleigh placed particular emphasis on alms giving and an unwillingness to fret over money or savings<sup>77</sup>. I never saw anyone refuse a beggar while in Eastleigh, and Muhammad's own generosity was frequently cited as well as verses 177 in Section 2 of the second Surah in the Qur'an. Repeatedly during the course of my research, portions of this particular Surah were recited and cited to explain individuals' situations and their decisions. The surah reads,

*It is not righteousness  
That ye turn your faces  
Towards East or West;  
But it is righteousness –  
To believe in Allah  
And the Last Day  
And the Angels  
And the Book  
And the Messengers  
To spend of your substance  
Out of love for Him  
For your kin,  
For orphans,  
For the needy,  
For the wayfarer  
For those who ask,  
And for the ransom of slaves;  
To be steadfast in prayer*

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<sup>76</sup> These are standard accounts of the responsibilities of Muslims. (see also Levy 1957)

<sup>77</sup> I believe that this concern for the well-being of others in Eastleigh is of particular importance in Eastleigh given the insecurity (financial and social) I highlight and discuss in Chapter 3.



*And practice regular charity,  
To fulfill the contracts  
Which ye have made  
And to be firm and patient,  
In pain (or suffering)  
And adversity  
And throughout  
All periods of panic  
Such are the people  
Of truth, the God-fearing.*

In one interview, for instance, I was in a shop in one of the more conservative malls in Eastleigh. In this particular shop, there were four different women selling exactly the same supplies: women's headscarves, *buibuis*, various styles of Somali traditional dresses, and bulk fabric. I asked them if they pooled their money or ever worried about not making enough during the day. Each of them told me that although they worried about being able to pay rent or afford schooling or medical care, they never felt in competition with the other ladies. Indeed, although they talked at length about these financial worries, they each repeated sections of this surah<sup>78</sup> to explain that God was working on their behalf and they always knew they could rely on him to help them, even when they were suffering or struggling. As I was about to ask them to elaborate, an elderly man came by and begged for money and food. His destitution and malnourishment were obvious in his boney frame, sunken-in cheeks, bulging eyes, and in his tattered clothing and broken flip-flops.

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<sup>78</sup> Depending on the context and who was speaking, nearly all of this particular surah was cited at one time or another. My research assistants would always inform me when it was stated.

When he arrived at the shop and asked for money, every person in the small room, including the two research assistants<sup>79</sup> who accompanied me there, and with whom I worked with briefly, gave him some coins. One of the women bought him a glass of camel-milk tea from a girl who sold it daily in the mall. As they handed him the money and the tea, he praised Allah, and thanked them. Several of the women then recited part of the aforementioned Surah.<sup>80</sup>

I asked the women, who had just told me that they struggled to pay their bills and that their businesses were not as strong as they had been in previous months, how they could afford to give him money. They again explained to me how important it was to help those who need helping. Here, Maimuna explains again:

Everything is expensive. You have seen it for yourself. But the Muslim people, God feeds them. Whatever they get is enough for them. Our culture and religion, our culture *is* religion. The way you have seen that we care each other and the mercy people have upon each other, and the way you see that we are happy when we are together, we don't think about life. Like the way you see some people do their calculations, they believe in economy. They say we will eat this tomorrow and I will eat this today – we do not do that. We believe that God who has created us provides for us and everything in his eyes is very easy. The ones who are wearing the headscarf like you and the ones who are wearing the hejab like mine, our behaviors, and those who are conservative, all of that is coming from our religion, Islam. If, for example, we were brought food, all of us who are seated here plus those who have come after the food has been brought, we will all eat together. And it is possible that the food just multiplies and adds up through God's will.

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<sup>79</sup> These particular research assistants, who I did not work with for more than a couple of weeks, and who came from rather well-to-do families had somewhat contradictorily been haggling furiously with me about their wages.

<sup>80</sup> I did not know this is what they recited until afterward when I asked my research assistants. At this point, according to Osop, they recited the section of the surah that emphasized assisting those in need.

From that day on, I carried a small coin purse around with me so that when I was asked for money in such occasions, I would also be able to assist them. As I did this more consistently, I began to earn the respect of those women who spent time with me.

In another conversation with Mama Fadumo and Jawahar, two women I befriended early in my research, Mama Fadumo explained the importance of assisting those in need.

For us, we would suffer however much, but we like taking our children to all the nice places, places that are clean so that they can study...we also like giving them [money] when they come to us. If I have a hundred shillings I will give [it to] them, if I have two I will give [it to] them. Because it is in our culture that if we have a bowl of food, and a hungry person comes, he /she will be given and the children would go without food. That's how our culture is. The reason, Allah, *subhanahu wata'alla*<sup>81</sup>, says share what you have and you will get more...so it's our culture. If you have more than somebody, then you are told to give it [by God] and God will give you more.

This kind of assistance was a vital aspect of being a good person for most of the individuals I talked to in Eastleigh. Here again, Mama Fadumo explains, with Jawahar nodding enthusiastically beside her,

In this market, if we hear about someone with a problem we help each other out. Someone is hospitalized. We raise funds – we get together – whoever has problems.... There is a girl who died in the hospital. The bill was more than a million [shillings]. She was sick. [It cost] about US\$20,000. We all made contributions and we paid. And then [her mother] was in debt of more than ten thousand dollars. She was a widow. Some people forgave the money they were owed, and we donated the rest and paid. So we settled the girl's bills in the hospital and in the market.

As a good moral person, one needed to ensure the proper education and discipline of her children, she needed to care for the elders in times of need and send them to Mecca if possible, and she needed to ensure that those in need received medical treatment. In this

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<sup>81</sup> God the merciful.

conception of morality, Somali moral persons are pious and as such, they work hard to adhere to the requirements of faith and personhood as dictated by Islam.

As individuals attend to their obligations as Muslims and follow these twelve instructions, they strengthen and fill their iman. Like a container with a small hole, the iman needs constant attention and constant refilling. There are, of course, supplementary ways to fill one's iman. There is a belief among Somalis that the words of the Qur'an as well as the book itself carries divine physical qualities. The words of the Qur'an are not just words of Allah, but they *are* Allah himself. They are not icons of him or representations of him, according to the Somalis in Eastleigh. To listen to Qur'anic recitations or drink water in which transcribed verses are immersed is to physically receive God<sup>82</sup>. During recitations, the words of the Qur'an possess a certain materiality. They enter a person's ears through the voice and any breath or spittle the words are carried on are absorbed through the skin. With a full iman, a person is protected from many things, including temptation, suffering, depression, being attacked by a shaytan, and even protection from physical harm on occasion.

One morning when I was meeting with my research assistants before a few interviews, I told them about an experience I had on the matatu the previous day. As usual, I had been wearing my buibui and headscarf. I was on Tom Mboya Street in Center City Nairobi, transferring matatus on my evening commute home. Shortly after I got off the matatu, as I was walking to the next matatu stage on the very crowded sidewalk I felt someone move very close behind me. I could feel the person's hot breath on the back of

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<sup>82</sup> Sacdiyo, whose story I will discuss at more length in Chapter 4, as well as Osop, Osop's family, Shamsa (who I will discuss later in this chapter) and others went regularly, some even daily, to drink the Qur'anically infused water. Several women I knew would bring empty water bottles with them to Sheikh Ahmed's house, where they could fill the bottles with such water and bring it home to keep on reserve. One woman I met never started her day without drinking this water.

my neck through my headscarf. I felt his hands shuffling at my lower back and suspected that he intended on mugging me. I tried to speed up, but the women walking in front of me monopolized the sidewalk with their enormous baskets and bags and, thus encumbered, were moving very slowly. There was no hole for me to sneak through. My heart raced. And then, just as suddenly, I could no longer feel the man behind me. Finding a gap in the pedestrian traffic I dodged to the side into the street. As I dashed across the street, I looked back over my shoulder. An Aqwaani man, dressed in the characteristic short trousers, sandals, and hennaed beard, was holding the wrist of a young man. He was scolding the man loudly, though I could not make out his words. The younger man stared at the ground.

When I finished my story, I asked my research assistants whether they thought I would have been mugged if that man had not stepped in. They said that the man was probably trying to mug me, yes. Then Osop joked that the Aqwaani man probably stepped in to defend me because he saw that I was wearing the buibui and he did not want me to feel discouraged about being a Muslim. She thought that it was likely that the man assumed I had recently converted<sup>83</sup> to Islam and if I had been mugged, I might think it is a sign that I should not have become a Muslim. Then in seriousness, she said that actually, Allah had probably intervened on my behalf.

Hijab, she explained, is more than just a scarf or a way of dressing. It is also a state of being. Yahye agreed. When people listen to and subsequently physically absorb the words of the Qur'an and the words of Islam, they benefit from a whole state of

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<sup>83</sup> There were several individuals over the course of my research who insisted that rather than using the word "convert" to describe someone who became a Muslim after being a member of a different religion, one should instead use the word "revert" because, according to them, all humans are born Muslim, they are just socialized into different religions by their parents. I choose to use the word convert to remain theologically neutral.

protection. My clothing was not literally what protected me from the mugger, but I had perhaps benefited from a whole state of being in hijab through my work and my interviews with people in Eastleigh. When one absorbs the truth of the words, one absorbs the protection of Allah embedded in those words. I asked Osop if it mattered that I had not converted to Islam; I was not sure I had an iman to fill let alone a full or heavy iman. She told me simply, “You are on the path Allah has put you on.”

Hijab, then, like faith itself, has both spiritual and material components and responsibilities. Striving toward achieving hijab as a state of being is part of the ethical work necessary for filling and maintaining one’s iman. When a person is doing the ethical work of filling her iman, she is fulfilling her obligations of Muslim personhood and achieving a state of protection and grace. To extend this then, when a person’s iman is strong or full, because she then will by default be in a state of hijab, the community as a whole benefits.

To illustrate this connection between ethical work of self and the making of a functional, moral, faithful community, Sheikh Ahmed<sup>84</sup> offered this story. When he was still in Somalia and teaching at a religious school, he met a young woman (and her husband) who was having marital problems. She and her husband fought all the time; her husband regularly beat her. After working with both of them for a short time, Sheikh Ahmed discovered that she and her husband were spiritually ill. For her part, Sheikh Ahmed believed that the woman had been attacked by a jinn, who was lodged in her brain and distracting her from her duties as a Muslim. She was not attending to her iman properly because of the jinn. Her husband, while he did not have a jinn, was also neglecting his duties. Because they had stopped working on their own imans, they had

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<sup>84</sup> Sheikh Hussein, also drew many connections between individual faith and community health.

started fighting with each other. As soon as they both resumed their spiritual work, they started to get along again; they were a functional family again. He continued,

Life in this world starts with the family, and so if things work out in a family and things work out in another family then the entire town in that sense would have people who are morally upright. But if one house is in a mess, the people who come out of that house will also be messy and the entire town will be as well. They will be bad people. And the public in general will be bad.

Working on one's faith and her moral way of being in the world has profound implications, then, not just on individuals but socially as well, and it requires constant attention. It is a responsibility not just to oneself, but also to one's community to behave in an ethical way and to continue to attend to one's obligations of piety and faith.

The connection between religion and morality or religion and personhood is frequently made in anthropological literature<sup>85</sup> (see Asad 1993; Csordas 2004, 2009; Douglas 1966; Durkheim 1925; Evans-Pritchard 1937; Lambek 2002; Lehmann and Meyers 1989; Lester 2005; Mahmood 2005; Malinowski 1922; Parish 1994; Rasmussen 1998; Robbins 2001, 2004, 2009a; Simon 2009; Turner 1974).<sup>86</sup> Taking a Foucauldian approach, Talal Asad (1993) focuses on the disciplinary practices associated with religion in the construction of moral persons. Similarly, in her recent work about Egyptian women's piety movements, Saba Mahmood (2005) looks at their attention to the ritual and personal obligations and performances of piety in their performance of ethical

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<sup>85</sup> I do acknowledge and agree with Zigon (2008) however that the moral is not necessarily always grounded in religious norms and ideologies.

<sup>86</sup> In his study of Azande witchcraft, for example, E.E. Evans-Pritchard pointed out that a statement like, "'It is witchcraft' may often be translated simply as 'it is bad'" (1968[1937]:107). Similarly, Rasmussen (1998) argues that witchcraft could be interpreted as a form of "moral discourse" given its ability to assist individuals and societies in identifying behaviors and dispositions that are considered inappropriate (see also Zigon 2008: 52). In his study of the Newar, Parish (1994) notes that the Newar persons are created by ritual rather than naturally; Newar moral personhood, then is not just a personal project but a social and religious one (1994:237).

selfhood. This attention to the religious and often disciplinary practices in attempts to understand and flesh out aspects of local moralities, the role of prayer (see also Simon 2009; Zigon 2007, 2008) and listening to prayer (Hirschkind 2001) in the construction of personhood has also been highlighted in several studies and ethnographies. Among the Urapmin, for example, Joel Robbins (2001) points out that prayer is seen as a kind of ritual and that through the ritual of prayer individuals constitute themselves as committed (i.e moral) persons.

In spite of a general agreement about some of the obligations for moral and pious personhood among Somalis in Eastleigh, there are, as I discussed earlier, some rather large debates about more of the specifics of piety and religious obligation that are a source of some tension among the Somalis I worked with. Over the course of the time I spent there, there had been a somewhat obvious transition toward publicly acceptable performances of modesty and piety in favor of more conservative paths of Islam. This was, of course neither universal nor something entirely new. Indeed, not only within Somali society but worldwide, there has been a debate and (contested) transition toward more conservative paths of Islam among many individuals.

### **Sufi/Salafi Debates in context**

The debates and arguments between Sufis and Salafis (or Wahhabis as they are sometimes called, and Aqwaanis as they are called in Eastleigh), or those debates concerning whether certain practices should be considered un-Islamic or shirk, are not unique to Somali society. Indeed throughout Africa these new reformist movements are



highly critical of the Sufi brotherhoods<sup>87</sup>. That said, to ignore the fact that various Sufi brotherhoods also undertook Islamic renewal efforts would be misleading, and again, Sufi devotional practices are available to all Sunnis, so there is no inherent contradiction in pointing out how individuals could become involved in Islamic renewal efforts and engage in devotional activities such as the dhkr.

In Northern Nigeria, Sudan, and Zanzibar, although the Islamic reform movements gained quite a bit of momentum in the 1970s, particularly in opposition to the established traditions of Islamic scholarship, most notably in opposition to the Sufi brotherhoods, Islamic reform movements were present throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Further, Islamic reform in these three areas was not limited to anti-Sufi agendas; indeed early in the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, there were powerful Islamic renewal efforts occurring from within various Sufi brotherhoods (turuq; Loimeier 2003). Further, to present the debates between “Islamic renewal groups” and “Sufi brotherhoods” as quintessentially antagonistic or to lump “Islamic renewal groups” into a monolithic entity would be to ignore the heterogeneity of the movements, their participants, and the various ties individuals and groups have with others around the world (Loimeier 2003).

Broadly, however, when referring to Islamic renewal, scholars like Loimeier (2003), Schulz (2008) and others agree that renewal is a “conscious and intentional effort to achieve social, religious, cultural, political, or economical change with respect to a specific society or specific aspects of social life. Muslim initiatives of reform, in fact, often concentrate on issues such as education, the proper ritual or the role of women...” (Loimeier 2003:240). Further, and although the actual specificity of criticism may have

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<sup>87</sup> Although it is important to note here that there remain various inconsistencies around the continent and even within particular communities about which specific practices should be considered shirk and which should not.

varied in different contexts, typically reformist movements have been very outspoken against the more “superstitious” elements of religious practice particularly revealed through the practice of “unIslamic” rituals (Loimeier 2003).

Similarly, in Mali, women associated with the Islamic renewal are distancing themselves from other women in their society who practice more “traditional” rituals, straying from the “sunna” requirements as articulated by the Prophet (Schulz 2008). Considering themselves “true supporters of Islam” (Schulz 2008: 22), they are actively participating in Muslim proselytization (*da'wa*) that encourages people to “revert” to more “authentic” forms of Islam, that draw on more direct connections to the Qur'an and hadith, rather than on other more mystical practices (Schulz 2008). Further, these women with whom Schulz worked, emphasized the role of action and activity rather than simply on discourse in terms of piety and self-making. Interestingly, similar to what we can see occurring in Somali communities in Kenya, in Mali, women who associate themselves with the *marabouts*, or the Sufi *turuq*, as well as the Salafi-Sunni (Saudi-influenced) or Wahhabi-Sunni (Egyptian-influenced) individuals consider their form of Islam “traditional” and “authentic” and the other group and set of practices as inauthentic. In all cases, according to Schulz, this idea of returning to “authentic” Islamic belief and practice on both sides figures prominently in their account of their moral endeavors (27).

The Islamic renewal that is happening currently in Mali is, however, gradually shifting its focus away from certain practices historically associated with Sufism. In particular, and with great emphasis placed on education, the leaders of this movement insist that rather than relying on intermediaries to intervene, individuals are responsible for their own actions and practice to ensure salvation (Schulz 2008: 28). She continues,

A woman's responsibility, the teachers argue, should translate into a persistent effort to understand and appropriate the written sources of Islam. It should show in her daily cultivation of a pious disposition. True religiosity should manifest itself not only in the performance of the conventional obligations of worship, such as the five daily prayers, but in a range of religious and social acts. Women's self-disciplinary endeavor should show in specific dispositional and emotional capabilities, among them (the capacity to feel) shame ('modesty'), endurance, patience, and a capacity for self-control and submissiveness. Women should practice these virtues in social and ritual activities in public and semipublic settings, so as to profess their ethical quest to a broader, potentially nationwide, audience, with the aim of extending their invitation to other Muslims (Schulz 28)

In East Africa, particularly on the Swahili coast in Kenya and Tanzania, the Islamic reform movement shifted from internal to external domination<sup>88</sup> in the later half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Kresse 2003). While keeping in mind Loimeier's warning to avoid a heavy-handed dichotomization between Islamic reform movements and "traditional," (often) Sufi orders, Kresse points out that on the Kenyan Swahili coast, there has existed a tension between the locally rooted Muslim practices and the more globally oriented Islamic movements (2003: 279). In Kenya, while the presence of the two groups had previously been more or less tolerated in the past, the tension has increasingly sparked animosity between the two broadly defined groups. In Mombasa, Sheikh Muhammad Kasim Masrui<sup>89</sup>, according to Kresse (2003) played a fundamental role in the escalation of these tensions. Published in the 1970s, "[h]is Islamic educational booklets display the rational principles that his reformist movement relied on and propagated, while they also contain passages of an overtly rationalist attitude and a more dogmatic tone that was to characterise the later stages of the reformist debate" (Kresse 2003: 280). This debate,

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<sup>88</sup> By external domination, I am referring to the various internationally founded movements that were having an impact on how individuals practiced in local contexts.

<sup>89</sup> His followers were later often denounced as being proponents of Wahhabism by their opponents.

Kresse argues, led by East African Islamic scholars is further linked to global debates within Islam revolving around Islamic reform.

With particular attention to an opposition to mystical Islam, Muhammad Kasim emphasized the need for every Muslim to have a direct relationship to God (without intermediaries) through the individual reading and understanding of the Qur'an and hadith, rather than simply through rote memorization. Among the practices of which Muhammad Kasim is most critical are certain practices of *tawassul*<sup>90</sup>. Specifically, Muhammad Kasim was critical of the practice of besieging deceased good or pious people to intercede on the behalf of the living, and in bargaining with God (Kresse 2003:292). Likewise, he argues that visiting the graves of saints and other holy people and the practice of dhikr as shirk. Importantly, as Kresse points out, while this reformist movement was one that started locally, it quickly linked with the somewhat more global Islamic reformist movements that would gain momentum in Kenya and around East Africa.

In discussing Sufism in Sudan now ruled by the Islamist party, Muhammad Mahmoud (1998) stated that the Islamists pose an “extremely difficult challenge” to Sufi orders. Also in Sudan, Rudiger Seesemann (2006) discusses the relationships among the Sufis and Islamists, focusing primarily on the Tijaniyya Sufi order.

“From a doctrinal point of view, Islamism represents a form of religiosity diametrically opposed to Sufism. Islamism pursues a political agenda, while Sufism traditionally holds politics in contempt, even if Sufis are not apolitical per se. Islamist often reproach Sufis for being reluctant to share their vision of an Islamic state. This criticism echoes earlier accusations against Sufism by representations of the Salafiyya reform movement in Egypt and elsewhere, who blamed the backwardness of Muslim societies on the alleged otherworldly orientation of Sufism.

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<sup>90</sup> This is Arabic for “intercession” and it refers to a desire to be near God.

Islamists also emphasize the individual's relationship with God, which, they claim, needs no intermediary. They therefore strongly condemn the veneration of Sufi masters as saints, dead or alive. This and other Sufi practices according to Islamists, amounts to shirk (i.e. associating others with God)...yet unlike the Wahhabiyya the Islamists do not go so far as to declare the Sufis unbelievers (*takfir*), applying to them instead the idea of "deviation" (*inhiraf*)" (33)

In Sudan, this is one of the most striking aspects of how Sufis are treated by the Islamic government (and differences in comparison to how the Sufis are currently being treated in Eastleigh). In Sudan, most noticeably, the words Sufi and Sufism are being actively avoided. Instead, the word *dhikr* has come to replace the word *tasawwuf*, which refers to specific practices associated with the English word, Sufism. In a similar effort to veil Sufism and make it compatible with the Islamist government, the word *dhikr* and its practice has been reframed from a politico-scholarly perspective to become partly synonymous with *jihad*. As this happens, there is a construction of some Sufis as "real" and others as "fake," thereby fracturing the Sudanese Sufi community and ensuring ongoing political dominance of the Islamic political party (Seesemann 2006).

Sufis and Aqwaanis in Eastleigh alike blame the ongoing problems in Somalia<sup>91</sup> on those people who lack faith or who do not understand what constitutes proper ethical work. Resuming and maintaining ethical responsibilities toward filling one's iman they believe is the key to rebuilding the collapsed moral world. A key aspect of the reconstitution of the Somali moral world, then, occurs through the specific healing processes in which individuals attend to their own imans. Here, as I have said, there has

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<sup>91</sup> Both sides believe that the fighting is caused by people without proper faith; determinations of who has proper faith, or whose work is actually ethical depend on who you talk to.

emerged a rather large dispute about what constitutes ethical behavior, specifically in relationship to the spirit world and rituals of worship.

### **The Jinn “Mafia”, Aqwaanis and Making a Healthy Moral Self**

#### ***Spirit possession in context***

Discussions of spirit possession and embodiment have been a long standing feature in anthropological studies (see Antze 1992; Beattie and Middleton, 1969; Boddy 1988, 1989, 1993, 1994; Bourguignon 1973a, 1973b, 1976; Comaroff 1985; Crapanzano 1973; Crapanzano and Garrison 1977; Csordas 1987, 1990, 1993; Fry 1976; Irvine 1982; Johnson 2002; Lambeck 1980, 1981, 1988a, 1988b, 1993; Lewis 1971, 1991; Lock 1993; Middleton 1991; Obeyesekere 1969, 1970, 1981; Ong 1987; Sharp 1990, 1993, 1994). In many of these studies, the relationships among health, religion and possession have featured prominently in analyses. Drawing on several studies, Boddy (1994) points out “...because the body is both the existential ground of belief and the locus of engagement with the spirit world, it is not surprising that possession is often expressed in physical terms, as somatic change or illness.... It should not blind us [however] to how religion and medicine subtly interweave” (1994: 411). Crapanzano (1977) suggests that possession could be understood as “an idiom for articulating a certain range of experience” (1977:10), emphasizing the idea that possession is about meaning, rather than simply symptom. In his ethnography, the physical symptom of a god’s favor (for them, identified through matted hair), becomes a meaningful local idiom for expressing hardship and illness (see also Ong 1989).

Possession does not, of course, necessarily index some sort of pathology, illness or distress. I.M. Lewis (1991), for instance, has argued that possession cults can be classified into two categories: central and peripheral. For Lewis, the central possession cults posit spirit possession as a positive experience, which involve communication and interaction with spirits who maintain the moral order. Peripheral cults, on the other hand, are ones in which possession may signal personal or social pathology. Spirit possession has been analyzed in some contexts to be a form or system of communication regardless of whether an individual is experiencing distress (see Boddy 1989; Lambek 1980, 1981, 1988; Sharp 1993). For Lambek, the spirits and being possessed offers such a contrast with normative cultural behaviors that it can offer a venue for an implicit commentary and critique on social order and morality (see also Boddy 1994:413).

By viewing possession as something pertaining to but not *only* something physical or related to health or distress, and by looking carefully at specific histories and cultural logics informing the practice (and context), we can gain a much more nuanced understanding possession as a lived, and performed meaningful practice. As Boddy states, “possession widens out from the body and self into other domains of knowledge and experience—other lives, societies, historical moments, levels of cosmos, and religions—cathing these up and embodying them.... They have to do with one’s relationship to the world, with selfhood—personal, ethnic, political and moral identity” (1994:414).

By unpacking the more social and contextual issues surrounding occurrences of spirit possession, we also unfold a layer pertaining to motivation. In much of the feminist literature on spirit possession, or literature that focuses on possessed women, we often are

offered a perspective and analysis whereby the more disenfranchised individuals in society (usually women) have harnessed the act of possession as a socially acceptable means of expressing grievances in a society in which they otherwise have little voice<sup>92</sup> (see Lewis 1971, 1986, 1991; Ong 1987; Wilson 1967). Whether or not scholars have chosen to take such functional interpretations of spirit possession, there is a well-documented acceptance of the benefits of being a member of such a cult, particularly as a woman within contexts that place women in somewhat marginal social positions.

In Spring's (1978) discussion of spirit possession among the Luvale in Zambia, the women's possession cult itself offers social support to its' members. They positively address ailments pertaining to fertility and motherhood in which healing rituals used offer a time for matrilineal kin to gather in an otherwise virilocal society. Critiquing Lewis' (1991) distinction between central and peripheral possession cults, whereby the peripheral cults (and those individual members became possessed) were assumed to be morally questionable and even pathological, feminist studies of possession have suggested that rather than being considered "peripheral," the role of such cults in the support of women in their households, communities and families should be considered (see Boddy 1988, 1989; Ong 1987, 1989; Sharp 1993).

Spirit possession has also been discussed at length in terms of other forms of power and local hegemonic understandings of morality, personhood, and social roles, other than gender. As Comaroff points out (1985) that local contexts in which possession cults emerge are not only made meaningful locally, but also are in response to larger, historical agendas and ideologies. Recognizing the role of, for instance, globalization,

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<sup>92</sup> There have been numerous critiques of this more functional approach to understanding the gendered and power-based interpretations of spirit possession (see Boddy 1994; Sharp 1993).



colonialism and modernity are just as important when unpacking people's lived experiences of possession as well as understanding any underlying motivations of individuals participating.

Drawing on the idea that spirit possession can be and is used as an idiom of communication provided to individuals, and acknowledging the both local and more global and historical contexts in which individuals interact with and respond to moments of possession, I believe that there is much to be gained intellectually by looking at those moments when Somali women are possessed and how they talk about when they have been. Among the Somalis living in Eastleigh, with some Sufi exceptions, the presence of the jinn and the moments when the jinn possess or take over an individual's body (or mind) was seen as a highly destructive and undesirable moment. For the non-Sufis I met in Eastleigh, the jinn were a source of much despair and distress and at least anecdotally, had become far more aggressive since the beginning of the Somali civil war.

Every Somali I have ever met acknowledges the existence of the jinn. They are referred to in the Qur'an. I was repeatedly told the story about how once when Muhammad was preaching to a group of people, some jinn were also in attendance. Until then, all the jinn were evil – they were the descendents of Iblis, or the devil, and were only interested in corrupting and destroying the human world. Coveting the humans' strength and beauty, the jinn desired only to lead them down paths of temptation and loss of faith. These jinn who listened to Mohamed preach, however, were inspired by the truth in his words and renounced the evil they had come to represent.

For the Aqwaanis and those who called themselves “just Muslims” (i.e. not Sufi), however, the good jinn, or those jinn who had embraced the truth of Islam, would not

intervene directly in the lives of humans. The only jinn who would interfere in human lives were interested in the destruction of human faith and in leading people astray. In a conversation with Sheikh Ahmed, I told him of Aihwa Ong's (1987, 1989) research in Malaysia in which she observed that female factory workers were frequently possessed by spirits. I summarized the academic analysis, which suggested that in many situations of spirit possession as a socially sanctioned way for individual otherwise disempowered women to articulate grievances or to resist oppressive social/labor conditions. Sheikh Ahmed shook his head. No, he said, although it is an interesting idea, academics had gotten it wrong. What was actually happened, he believed, was that the jinn had fused so intimately with these women, that their happiness and health depended solely on the happiness and health of their human hosts. If these women were being possessed at specific moments of oppression or pain, it was because the jinn himself had suffered enough of the mistreatment and was acting out through his host to protect himself. Although it may have appeared to the outsider that the jinn was advocating for the women, or even that the women were being empowered through the possession process, it was actually evidence that they were quite spiritually ill and needed to be treated right away. "The shaytan wrap themselves around the souls of the people they possess," he explained.

The jinn, which are profoundly self-serving, are particularly effective at leading people astray. According to Sheikh Ahmed and others, they are good at it because of their highly specialized organization (and division) of labor and information gathering as well

as their ability to procreate rapidly<sup>93</sup>. There are many different kinds of jinn who all work collaboratively and systematically to corrupt people so on judgment day the human soul will be condemned to hell. The jinn were described as resembling a mafia where each individual one has a specific assignment from Iblis, the devil, who is effectively, the godfather of the Jinn Mafia family<sup>94</sup>. Here, Sheikh Ahmed elaborates,

They work on their own. There is Iblis, one man called Iblis, and God cast him and he was chased away from the heavens. Do you know the history behind that? Do you know of a man called Iblis who sent Hawa<sup>95</sup> astray and was cast [out] by God and he was the start of disobedience. He was created from flames. And so there is that person as revealed by our Qur'an. And so there is an entire government that is ruled by that one. And so the government that he rules is divided into all of those [different jinn]. And so Iblis is the father of all of them. They all have one father, and it is Iblis. And all of his children are divided into different groups. One is the qareen I was telling you about that fattens on you. And there are others that are specifically meant for illnesses and there are others that are specifically dhabeelo. And he is the father of all of them, right?

And so the one that fattens on you [the qareen] will relay the information, if the army will be sent to this family and how they can be held hostage. And what the easiest way is to go about it. He relays that information to his government [the family of Iblis]. Or whether he will bring sickness to you, or whether they will just leave you alone. He will always reveal your secrets. They are called ambassadors; they will write down everything you say. 24 hours he is recording what you do. Your personality. Who you met – record it. You understand that? When it fattens, it will take your secrets to a place where there are others who are waiting to be deployed. When he takes the information to the government there, you will either be attacked or you will just be left alone, depending on what they decide. But then they should spy on everyone and get the information.

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<sup>93</sup> Interestingly, for most of the Somalis I talked to, including religious leaders like Sheikh Ahmed, the jinn created families—kin structures—mirroring Somali patrilineal segmentary lineage. Lewis (1991, 1999) argued that they did not do such things and were far less organized.

<sup>94</sup> Lewis (1998) writes that the idea of a hierarchy of jinn, or what Sheikh Ahmed called a jinn mafia family, has roots in the Cushitic mythology, where the traditional Cushitic spirit world was adapted to Islamic cosmology.

<sup>95</sup> Hawa is Eve in the story of Creation.

To clarify, according to Sheikh Ahmed, Iblis sends a *qareen*, a specific kind of jinn or shaytan<sup>96</sup>, to follow every human being around to gather information about that person<sup>97</sup>.

When the qareen is actually residing in the human, it becomes very connected to the human and its health is directly related to the person's spiritual health or faith/iman. He elaborates on this connection in a story about the conversation between two qareen.

Two human men met on the street one day. One was a sheikh, and the other a rich man. Naturally, while they were talking, the two qareen were also talking. He [the qareen accompanying the shaykh] did not have any clothes and was hunched over. The rich man's qareen was fat. He was very well dressed, his hair was combed, and he looked nice. He was wearing very nice clothes. And they [the two qareen] started talking. [The fat one] said, "What happened to you? You look like you have a lot of problems, you are nothing but skin and bones. What happened to you?" [The thin one] replied, "The person I am with is a Muslim. He prays five times a day, is up almost all night reading the Qur'an, he fasts when he is supposed to and treats his wife well. He teaches others about Islam and he eats only what is necessary for survival. Whenever he is eating food, he says *bismillah*. He is not a glutton, he does not cheat people, he does not lie or consume evil substances. He helps those in need and he gives what he has to the poor. He does not fight and he is not jealous. And that is why I have suffered. And so I am not able to share any nutritional value with my human soul. I will soon die."<sup>98</sup> But you, you are fat and healthy! You must eat every day! Then the fat one replied, "Yes, my man is evil. He steals, lies, he does not pray although he tells his friends and family that he does. He chews miraa, drinks alcohol and smokes cigarettes and he mistreats women. The person that I am with does not say *bismillah*. I am with him, and I share nutritional value with him. When he combs his hair, he also combs mine. And I sleep in the same bed with him. That is why I look so nice."

And then two others joined and spoke. One [of the qareen] is with a rich man in a very senior position. If you see the way he is dressed, he is wearing a tie, he drives a nice car. The other one is wearing all these tattered clothes, has a black ass – you have seen the Africans – he has small clothes wrapped around this area, he has no clothes and his skin doesn't look good either. He has no food to eat. He eats in the trashcans.

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<sup>96</sup> Shaytan is one of the categories of spirits associated with spirit possession in the anthropological literature; It is also, of course, a term used in the literature to refer to Satan.

<sup>97</sup> I was told repeatedly that I had not only one jinn following me, but as many as 15-20 at one given time.

<sup>98</sup> Meaning, he is not able to feed on the food his host eats because it is Allah's blessed food.

He is very poor. He asked him, “What happened to you?” The poor qareen replied, “I am with this very poor man.” [The rich man] said, “I am with this very rich one.” And so the shaytan is what you are. The very poor ones live in Africa. It eats shit and trash, eats unwanted parts of the meat, he has no clothes and he is smelly. And the other one is beautiful, that is the one that is with the rich man. He is with someone who is rich. You understand that? And so he is what the person is. And so if a person is made to suffer, than the qareen also suffers. If someone is in poverty, he is also in poverty. If someone is in a lot of comfort, then the qareen is in it too. Let alone that you have seen the way some humans are more advanced in technology than others. They are also in those different classes of advancement in technology. The ones who are living in those technologically advanced countries, they are more knowledgeable with technology, more than the ones living in Africa. And so the qareen is what the human hosts it.

It is with everybody so it can lead them astray. It talks to you from outside. And it programs it [doubt, temptation, immorality] into your soul, said the prophet. The person [with qareen and no faith] is inclined to run towards evil. If someone is not sick, how else? What I mean is, it will whisper to you from outside, it walks with you, it sleeps with you, if you eat food, it eats with you. And that is how it relays your information. It is a spy. And they are with every human. They will spy on what somebody does for a living and they work towards sending somebody astray and that is their work.

Not all jinn are qareen, of course. In addition to the jinn spies, there are many other kinds of jinn and spirits that prey on vulnerable, weak humans<sup>99</sup>. In some cases, they are named based on the action they perform or embody. The saar<sup>100</sup>, for example, are still jinn and therefore dangerous, but according to Sheikh Ahmed, and confirmed by my research assistant, Yahye, “they usually come in the form of dancing. The person being possessed needs to dance and is very much affected by drums and music. It is called saar because the word itself refers to the kind of music the jinn favors.”<sup>101</sup> The “Dhabeelo,” or the

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<sup>99</sup> Importantly here, is that humans are conceived of as weak because they have a weak or light iman.

<sup>100</sup> For other literature on the saar, or zar spirit cults, see Boddy (1988, 1989, 1992); Kenyon (1992); Lewis (1990, 1986, 1989, 1991, 1998).

<sup>101</sup> Lewis (1998) writes that the saar jinn do not favor the music, but are expelled from the body by people who are masters of the saar, during public, entertaining dance rituals. During the time I was in Eastleigh, I never heard reference to or discussion about any such saar possession dances or ceremonies. That said,

“wind” jinn only rarely have physical form or occupy a person for any length of time. They are like a wind that passes through a human body and deposits a blockage or residue that causes physical, spiritual, and emotional problems in the human host. Osop, my dear friend and research assistant struggled at one point with what her biomedical doctors initially thought was a kidney infection. But when they could not identify the source of the problem or any actual kidney infection, she finally sought the help of Sheikh Ahmed. Her illness, he discovered, was the result of residue left behind by a dhabello that passed through her; “It was a sewage problem,” Osop explained to me. Once Sheikh Ahmed cleared the debris and waste left behind by the “wind” jinn, Osop was healed.

Like Osop, most Somalis believe that the jinn are a source of illness; as I.M. Lewis stated, “Spirit-possession for Somali is essentially an illness, an unwanted, undesirable state associated with affliction and suffering: spirits cause disease, they do not cure it” (Lewis 1998: 112). 22-year-old Asha blamed the jinn on her own ill health as well as for her marriage failure. She told me that she started going to see the Sheikh before her divorce, when she was having troubles with her now ex-husband. “The jinn caused my separation from my husband,” she told me frankly. “85% of sickness is from the jinn.” She continues,

I went to see the sheikh because of these problems with my husband. I was blaming him for mistreating me, but it turns out the jinn were causing me to behave badly and think that he was a bad man. After 7-8 months of going there every day, the jinn talked through me and explained to the sheikh why he was causing the problems between me and my husband. You see the jinn don’t want two good Muslims to be together because they will kill the jinn.

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close connections have been drawn between the saar spirit possession ritual and the dhikri (dhikr), which I will discuss at more length later in this chapter.

Before this day, I spent every day going to the hospital and the chemist trying to discover why I was so sick<sup>102</sup>. But now I only go to the sheikh when I am feeling ill. I also go to madrassa every morning before I prepare the midday and evening meals for the house<sup>103</sup>. In the evening I read the Qur'an or I listen to verses on CDs or I watch a sheikh on one of these DVDs.

It is very important to get rid of your jinn. The jinn follow people around who have a light imam – those who don't pray and follow all the guidelines put forth by Mohamed. There are people who still feed their jinn because they don't know about the proper religion and this is bad. It is shirk – giving something to the jinn and it automatically sends you to hell. In Somalia there were many people who did not know about Islam because they weren't learning properly and they were giving feasts to their jinn. Now here there are still people who are giving feasts to their jinn, but they do this because there are people who disguise themselves as sheikhs but who are really in cahoots with the jinn. They trap the person and make them believe that the jinn is good and it is better to make him happy.

I was once visiting a friend in the hospital. I was reading verses [of the Qur'an] to my friend who was very sick. Each day I passed another woman who was very ill and the doctors did not know what was wrong or how to help her. I suggested to her family that they read the Qur'an to her because it was clear that there was a jinn possessing her and causing troubles for her. But they refused. Instead, they brought a man who claimed to be a sheikh to arrange for a feast for the jinn. I watched as they talked to the jinn and her body convulsed. I ran away and read my Qur'an because I knew that was evil.

There is a close connection between ill health, a light or weak iman, and spirit possession.

Once again, I believe that preventing and healing after moments of spirit possession or spirit pollution requires specific ethical work and performance.

“I feel hot when the jinn are there. Very hot. And I have a lot of worry. I am much dizzier and there is pain in my whole body. That is when I know there are jinn,” Suad told me in her shop in the market one day. Suad was a 38 year-old mother of 3 boys, the

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<sup>102</sup> Here, by “sick” she is referring both to her physical health, which the jinn was also compromising, and to her emotional state that was causing problems in her relationship with her husband.

<sup>103</sup> Asha lived in a house with 18 other people, mostly relatives of varying degrees of closeness to her.

eldest of whom, nearly twenty years old, helped her at work. When Osop and I arrived that afternoon, she sent her son to get some tea in the restaurant that was on one of the floors above her shop, and we sat down to chat. Suad told us how people have hired a *sixirlo* to send jinn to attack her seven times. As soon as she started talking about the *sixirlo*, Suad started whispering.

These people wanted to attack me because I am good at business and they are lazy. Before they wanted to attack me because they were always jealous of my beauty. But I am not beautiful anymore because since I had to come here – since the war – I have had problems. The worry and the stress show on my face now, so I am not beautiful any more. But people still send the jinn after me because they are jealous of my small success in the business. And sometimes when a man wants to marry you and you don't want to marry him, he will scorn you and utter some things that he doesn't even realize are witchcraft because they are not stones and bones. The problems in Somalia are really making all this, this jinn problem, worse. I believe the jinn problem is bigger since the war. Before people would gather and socialize and read the Qur'an together. They would talk about the history of Islam.

To exorcise the jinn and heal afterward, Suad attended a healing session, a place where the Qur'an was recited specifically for healing purposes, as often as she could. She told me that some of the women attended daily; Osop nodded. Her mother and sister were among those who did. The healing session is a place where the Qur'an is read for healing purposes. In the Somali community, it usually takes place in a Sheikh's house. At the healing session, a specific kind of incense is burned and people bring jugs of water over which the sheikh recites verses. When the sheikh recites verses over a jug of water, the water itself becomes infused with the strength and healing power of Allah and the water itself becomes medicinal. One can drink and clean with it. In the healing sessions, the



sheikh is also capable of using specific herbs to assist with the cleansing of whatever spiritual problem exists<sup>104</sup>.

Sheikh Ahmed told many stories about how he was called to help other healers based around the world. In his most recent request, a colleague of his from the Madina University in Saudi Arabia called him to ask him for help and advice about a female jinn who had possessed and subsequently married his son<sup>105</sup>.

Sheikh Ahmed is a healer. He helps people heal their bodies and spirits and helps restore their imans. I believe that in spite of being ill, the act of going to see the sheikh is an ethical act in Somalis society. Doing the work of going to see the sheikh is itself a faith-building exercise. During those moments when people fall ill, they are faced with a dilemma about who to go and see. Currently in Eastleigh, there is social pressure to at least claim to go to see a religious healer before a biomedical doctor<sup>106</sup>. More so, unless one suffers from something like malaria, diabetes or a broken limb, many individuals would opt for religious healing first.<sup>107</sup> Suffering, then, once a person chooses to start seeing Sheikh Ahmed or someone like him, becomes a form of suffering-for.

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<sup>104</sup> Although people with a light iman are the most vulnerable to jinn attacks and subsequent illness, people with strong faiths are also at risk.

<sup>105</sup> According to Sheikh Ahmed, the son of a renowned Islamic scholar in Saudi had been possessed by a female jinn. This jinn had trapped the young man in such a way that he was only interested in having relations with the jinn; he was uninterested in marrying anyone else. Evidently, the jinn emerged and took over the young man's body whenever something sexually suggestive came on the television. After consulting with Sheikh Ahmed, they all decided that it would be necessary to purchase and import to Saudi Arabia a few varieties of porn to forcibly show the young man. Once the jinn emerged, his father and several other religious leaders could rapidly read the Qur'an to the jinn (who would be unable to hide again within the young man because of her inability to resist the pornography), to ultimately either kill or exorcise her.

<sup>106</sup> In a structured interview with a man in the market at one point, when he first answered the question about going to see a biomedical doctor or a religious healer first, he started to say doctor but he was interrupted by a man who was listening hissing, "say healer."

<sup>107</sup> There are other exceptions, such as with the case of cancer, which was widely understood to be a biomedical problem. In such cases, however, most individuals I talked to would then consult *both* the biomedical doctor and the spiritual healer.

Shamsa, for example, was a lovely young woman whom I met a few months into my fieldwork, suffers from various spiritual (jinn-related) illnesses. I met her through a dear friend of mine in Eastleigh. When I met her, she and her sister had both been diagnosed by Sheikh Ahmed as suffering from multiple spirit possessions simultaneously. Shamsa was 17 years old, and when I met her, her eyes seemed vacant. My friend told me that she would regularly have “fits” and “seizures,”<sup>108</sup> but the biomedical doctors could find nothing wrong with her. The first time I met her, she was sitting in the corner of the room playing with a small toy. She hardly acknowledged her sister and did not pay the least attention to me. I asked my friend what was wrong with her sister. She told me that Shamsa was suffering because there were close to 250 jinn living in her body; they had taken over her mind and would occasionally stage rather violent outbursts, usually against their mother, when one of the many jinn became restless or unsatisfied in some way. When I asked my friend how her sister was being treated, she told me that after spending a fortune on biomedical diagnostic tests, which were ultimately inconclusive, they went to Sheikh Ahmed, who finally saw the jinn and the damage they were doing to Shamsa.

After she was diagnosed, Shamsa spent several hours each day with Sheikh Ahmed and in the evenings and nights either her mother or one of sisters would recite the Qur'an to her. My friend explained that this brought calm to Shamsa for the first time since she was a little girl. She also described her awe when seeing Sheikh Ahmed interact with Shamsa that first day. She and her mother had escorted Shamsa to the healing session and upon entering, Shamsa started screaming and kicking and hitting everything

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<sup>108</sup> My friend's words, which she said in English.

in sight. She was desperate to leave, my friend explained. When Sheikh Ahmed got near Shamsa, she was almost uncontrollable. Sheikh Ahmed explained to Shamsa's family, that the jinns residing in her recognized the danger of being so close to someone so clean; he explained how the jinns were desperate to leave his house because they knew they would be in trouble and either killed or exorcised, so they had taken over her body to get her to leave the premises. Shamsa attended the healing sessions for over a year and according to my friend, was finally calmer and happier because of it. Unfortunately for them, however, the jinn were too many and had bonded too closely with Shamsa. About 8 months after I left Eastleigh, my friend told me that Shamsa had finally passed away.

Spirit possession among the non-Sufi (and some Sufi) Somalis in Eastleigh was seen as a very destructive thing. I asked Shamsa's sister why she thought Shamsa suffered so much and why the jinn had targeted her in particular. My friend told me that Shamsa had been targeted because she was a member of a very religious family and the jinn were trying to attack that family and their faith. She also told me, however, that because Shamsa had been working so hard, in the ways she could, on restoring her iman (here by listening to the Qur'an and attending the healing sessions at Sheikh Ahmed's house), Shamsa would know heaven. Although she was suffering, to borrow Jason Throop's (2008) concept, she could be seen as "suffering for." Her morality was not in question; her family had just not recognized the significance of the situation until the jinn had a vice-like hold on Shamsa.

Importantly for my argument, I believe, is that this family had arrived in Eastleigh from Somalia when Shamsa was a small child. When they first arrived, they, like everyone fleeing Somalia had suffered great loss and experienced violence. They

struggled with financial insecurity, the grief and worry related to not knowing how their family was in Somalia, and they were not having a lot of luck in applying for third country resettlement. Further, when they arrived, they identified as Sufis and practiced various rituals accordingly<sup>109</sup>. The idiom of communication of spirit possession, not just for Shamsa, but also for those interpreting her illness, offered an explanation of her illness in a context that was inexplicable and otherwise irrational and scary. Further, in using this idiom of communication, Shamsa's whole family refocused their attention on their own moral obligations of piety and personhood and placed their faith, not in resettlement or trying to explain away problems, but in Allah.

That there is great suffering, both physical and mental, is of no real surprise if one knows the history of the war, displacement, and the insecurity of life in Eastleigh. I believe that paying attention to the larger contexts in which people experience moments (or as in the case of Shamsa, long periods of time) when one is possessed, we can also unpack Somali notions of morality as well as the desire to define ethical and unethical behavior. Shamsa was a passive victim of the situation, but the rest of the family could and did learn from Shamsa's condition and had altered their behaviors accordingly. The pressure to identify behaviors that could potentially weaken one's iman, as well as the pressure to pursue activities and behaviors to fill or strengthen it was strong among those Somalis I worked with. While people who were possessed were not pathologized or judged as harshly as those suffering from *buufis*,<sup>110</sup> it was still often perceived as

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<sup>109</sup> I want to be clear here, however, that I am in no way suggesting that the reason for Shamsa's illness was because she and her family practiced rituals associated with Sufism. I merely want to point out that they were no longer practicing Sufi rituals or forms of worship.

<sup>110</sup> I will discuss *buufis* at great length in Chapter 6.

symptomatic of an inattention to moral and religious obligations. Once someone began the process of rectifying their behavior, their morality was no longer in question.

As I stated earlier in this chapter, however, there were groups of people in Eastleigh who maintained some sort of relationship with the jinn and other spirits. In the next section, I will spend minimal time talking about the jinn-human relationships, but instead focus on how individuals embody certain religious spirits as well as their faith in their performance of morality. Sufism, as I discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, was historically the path Somalis followed. In recent years, and as I will show in the course of the following two case studies, there has been a trend among many Somalis to view Sufism as a less authentic form of Islam. This criticism is based on the idea that many of the more mystical practices and rituals performed by Sufis were shirk. Nevertheless, it is important to show how the Sufis embody their spirituality and physically and spiritually perform their obligations of piety, faith and morality.

### **Sufis and the Dikhr (Dhikri)**

One morning I got a text message from Yahye, who was my contact person in the Sufi community. His mother and aunt were both very active and well-known in the Sufi community and his cousin had a long-standing relationship with a jinn. I had been pestering Yahye to introduce me to his aunt so I would be allowed to go to the dhikri.

I was interested, therefore, in the fact that his cousin had a long-standing relationship with the same jinn. He would cause her harm when he was unhappy, but nevertheless she was not terribly interested in expelling him completely. I had been

hoping to interview her and her jinn about their relationship. The text message I received from Yahye that morning addressed this request.

Hey Anna, just spoke 2 my cousin..says she's afraid of talking abt her jinn because they recently made peace n she fed it so when she talks about it, it'll come back to bother her. N so can't talk. Asks if she can send it 2 u n u talk in person. Told her she's nuts. Sorry.

Although I was disappointed that I would not be able to talk to this woman about her jinn, there were others I did talk to about the relationships with various spirits and how they viewed and performed their relationship with Allah. Sheikh Hussein, for instance, believes that the good jinn or spirits<sup>111</sup> who have been converted to Islam can be helpful and insightful to humans. Being closer to God, they can advocate for a human, help her strengthen her faith, and even teach her about Islam. Though he would not tell me in detail about him, Sheikh Hussein talks regularly with a jinn sheikh named Issa who visits him. According too Sheikh Hussein, Issa is wise, thoughtful, and a good teacher. Similarly, during the *dhikr*, Sheikh Hussein explained that the spirits come to praise the Prophet with the humans through the recitation of songs and stories.

For Sufis, attendance at the *dhikr* is an important and powerful ethical ritual participation in which was understood as a performance of piety. In Arabic, *dhikr* means remembrance of God and while most Muslims in Eastleigh accept the *dhikr* as Sunna when assumed as an individual responsibility, certain Sufi orders institute it as a collective ceremonious act and event. In doing so, these Sufis are regularly criticized by others for practicing something that is not explicitly commanded in the Qur'an or hadiths. Nevertheless, attendance at the *dhikr* remains common among individuals in the Sufi communities in Eastleigh.

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<sup>111</sup> He would, therefore, not refer to them as shaytan.

The three most prominent Sufi orders in Somalia are the Qaadiiriya, Ahmadiya, and Saalihiya, though the Qaadiiriya is the oldest and most populated and was by far the largest order in Eastleigh<sup>112</sup>. Its' *dhikr* is most common in Eastleigh. In this section I will discuss two different Sufi prayer meetings with the same group of women one year apart. It is important to note that during this year, Sufis experienced increasing levels of persecution and ridicule by non-Sufis<sup>113</sup>. Their practices, including the *dhikr*, were believed to be *shirk*. As such, although they believe the work they do when they go to *dhikr* is ethical work, Aqwaanis believe it is actually just the opposite.

### **Dhikr 2007**

The first time we went to the *dhikr*, Osop and I were nervous. My plans to attend had already fallen through a couple of times. Yahye, who set up the meeting with his aunt for me, promised that we would be warmly received. They were expecting us as we walked in the metal gate. Zaynab, her step-sister, and her step-sister's daughter, Aisha, came down to greet us. Both women were wearing a *baati* and a *garbasar*<sup>114</sup>. Osop was visibly nervous and a bit uncomfortable though she would initially not admit it<sup>115</sup>. We

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<sup>112</sup> I met only a handful of people in Eastleigh who identified with one of the other orders.

<sup>113</sup> I heard regularly from non-Sufis that as soon as the problems with the transitional government were resolved, they would oust the Sufis. I also heard from Sufis themselves that the Aqwaanis were affiliated with Al-Qaeda and they were going to terrorize the Sufis and were already doing this. Additionally, while people regularly admitted to me when I started research that they were Sufi, they became far less willing to say such things in public toward the end of my research. Over the course of the two years, I also noticed a marked change in the common ways women and men alike dressed, including individuals I had known the whole time. I was told that publicly even the Sufis felt the need to start dressing in a more Aqwaani way so as not to be noticed. Several people also described how they felt that the Aqwaanis had a more accurate view of Islam and that they desired to help others realize this as well.

<sup>114</sup> This is significant because the Aqwaanis would never go out in public without at least wearing a *buibui*, but more often a *jilbaab* and thick *hijab*. The *baati* and *garbasar* were considered houseclothes.

<sup>115</sup> Osop was not Sufi and believed that the more mystical of the Sufi practices were un-Islamic. She had also never attended a *dhikr* and, as I later found out, she was nervous about how she would be received as well as what attending the event might do to her own *iman*.

walked up the stairs and could hear women chanting and singing from a room toward the back of the apartment. The thin sheet of fabric tacked at the door-jam above served as a door. There was an enormous pile of shoes outside the room: easily fifty pairs. Zaynab took my hand and told me again that I was most welcome<sup>116</sup>. We followed her into the room. Although everyone stared – even gawked at me – the chanting and singing never stopped. The women were singing praises to the various women in Muhammad’s life, as well as to Muhammad himself. The room was filled, wall-to-wall, with women seated on the floor with their knees pressed against their chests and their palms open and raised to shoulder-level. The women initially doing the calls were no older than twenty or twenty-five years old. They appeared to have three different levels of proficiency – one was quite good. She clearly knew the verses well, controlled her voice with precision and had authority as she called. When I asked Yahye later about the why he thought the young women were leading the calls, he explained that early on in the *dhikri* it was common for the younger women to lead the prayers and they were trained on a Qadiriyya *turuq* compound in rural Kenya.

While most of the people in the room were chanting, a group of elderly women sitting in the corner were whispering loudly about me. Osop told me that they were debating about whether they should stop the chanting and talk to me right then, but another old woman silenced them and told them that they could talk to me during lunch. But lest one assume incorrectly that she took seriously her (their) responsibilities to teach me about the importance of the *dhikr* and Islam more generally, she then told a long

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<sup>116</sup> She had initially agreed to let me attend because she believed it was Allah’s way of bringing me to the righteous path. Allah was literally using my research to help me find my faith.



parable about Muhammad and said that it was everyone in the room's responsibility to help me find my path<sup>117</sup>.

The chanting continued. As I was learning how and when to respond to the chants with an "Amen" and when I should say something else, a young looking girl asked me why I was not singing along. I told her that I did not know what I was saying. She said, "You are praising God. You know Amen, right?" She cued me so I would know when to say which word; the old woman sitting next to the young girl smiled with pride. Later, this girl put perfume<sup>118</sup> on my properly raised hands as it was being passed around.

There were long calls and responses. People were swaying to the rhythm of the music; the calls were predominantly in Arabic, though there were some Somali verses as well. There was a long song in Somali about Muhhamad and the peace he enjoyed in his life. The words of this song called the participants to celebrate peace and life. By this time women were crying, wailing, sweating heavily. Many of them had their open hands in the air as they responded to the calls. Everyone was barefoot though they had their feet tucked under the hems of their baatis. Not one woman in the room wore a jilbaab and Osop and I were the only ones wearing buibui. I.M. Lewis (1998) and others have drawn parallels between the *saar* spirit trance dance and the state of trance people hope to be in by the end of the dhikr. This state of being in trance, which the women there referred to as the time "when things really got started," entails the women embodying a union with Allah.

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<sup>117</sup> As I have talked about in previous chapters, many of the Somalis I met in Eastleigh believed that my research was Allah's way of bringing me to the right path and converting to Islam.

<sup>118</sup> The perfume, they explained later to me, was sunna and adorning myself with it during prayer was particularly honorable.

After a couple hours of sitting in the room chanting, the whole group split up to eat a meal together. Osop and I were sent to eat with the younger women. After lunch, as it was almost dusk, Osop and I left the dhikr, even though I was told I would be missing the best part. They then turned to Osop and told her that if she showed me to the correct path and I took it, Osop would go to heaven and be rewarded by God. They hoped that I would find my path, and they encouraged Osop to be more proactive with her proselytizing.

Clearly, the dhikr is an important ritual for those Somalis who participate in it. When I talked to people during and after it, they always emphasized how participation in these sessions made them feel a sense of calm and closeness to God. It was for them a way of performing piety and strengthening their iman and in spite of the criticism levered against them regularly for participating in something that was seen by other Muslims as shirk, they saw it as an ethical ritual. Moreover, as is revealed in the conversations the women had with me and Osop surrounding my own faith, in the ways people talked about the importance of the dhikr, one can see some of the more didactic forms of morality.

During the following year, however, as the Salafi/Aqwaani influence gained power and influence, people who participated in the dhikr experienced increasing persecution and judgment. By 2008, as I will show shortly, many of the women who still participated in the dhikr had changed some of the ways acted and worshipped both in the prayer session itself and publicly.

## **Dhikr 2008**

When I went back to the same dhikr in 2008, I had no reason to think that I would not be treated as kindly as I had been the previous year. Even though there appeared to be a heightened defensiveness and self-protection among the Sufis I knew and had known, I did not expect it to have any kind of impact on my presence at the dhikr. The day before I went to the event, I had conducted a lengthy interview with Sheikh Hussein about Sufi devotional practices and about the role of the dhikr. Like Sheikh Ahmed, Sheikh Hussein believed that God helps those who have faith through hard times. He thumbed his prayer beads the entire time he talked to me.

We arrived at the apartment complex at 2 pm the day after meeting with Sheikh Hussein. His wife and mother attended the dhikri there, and he had encouraged me to return. In spite of the risk, we were prepared to stay until late in the evening, “when the deep dhikr”<sup>119</sup> would start so that we could see what went on once the old ladies started their chanting, and people started falling into trances.

When we walked in, although, people clearly remembered me. They immediately demanded to know whether I had become a Muslim. Unwilling to lie, I told them I was still learning about Islam but that no, I was not a Muslim. Maryan and I were shuffled into a side room, adjacent to the room where the chanting was happening. A plate of rice and several pieces of meat, as well as two small metal glasses of powdered pink lemonade were unceremoniously deposited in front of us. Three women interrogated me. “Why don’t you just become a Muslim? What are you waiting for? You were here a year ago and you said that you were going to be a Muslim then. And now, you are still

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<sup>119</sup> I was told that later in the evening the spirits would really come to the women praying. That was the desired effect. I hadn’t been able to attend that late yet because as it usually happened late at night and Eastleigh was not particularly safe after dark. On this particular night, Maryan had already pre-arranged a car to collect us when we called.

waiting?” I replied that no, as I had said last year, I was a student doing research. I never said that I was going to become a Muslim. They called me a liar. Then a very thin woman with a birthmark on her bottom lip came in the room. She had wild eyes and a tattered headscarf. She kept touching my cheeks and shoulders. She held my shoulders for a little too long. No one intervened on my behalf; no one told her to stop touching me. The women in the small room shamed me. They accused me of taking my time and avoiding my responsibilities. They told me that if only I would convert to Islam then they would talk to me about their religion and faith. Sheikh Hussein’s mother walked in the room and spat out a few words in Somali nodding slightly toward me. The women in the room nodded and looked back at me. They also shamed Maryan for not trying to convert me. They accused me of being dishonest with them since it was taking so long for me to convert; I was wasting their time. Many of the women thought I should not be allowed in the room where the dhikr chanting was happening. They argued. After twenty minutes, I was asked to sit in a different room while they questioned Maryan. Later I found out that they rudely asked her for her clan identity, and upon finding out she was from a minority clan ridiculed her. When she finally joined me again, I could tell she was upset.

Finally a younger woman came in the room and invited me to come with her to the room where the dhikr was being held. I suspended my urge to run the other direction and I followed her in. Maryan came in right behind me. The format was the same as before; there were young women calling songs out and the rest of the room responded: Amen. I sat down, folded my knees at my chest and tucked my feet under the hem of my buibui. Then I raised my hands, palm up to the sky and started participating as I

remembered how. I was pummeled with looks of contempt<sup>120</sup>. I stopped singing and put my hands back to my sides and tried to look small.

The woman with the birthmark on her lip was near me; She was flailing around on the floor crying and moaning. Occasionally she would sit up and yell out a word or the name of a song and then she would return to her floor spasms. Maryan whispered in my ear that this woman was possessed by a jinn. It was likely, she thought, that the woman's jinn was a fan of the Prophet's wives. The old woman sitting next to the possessed woman kept trying to cover her feet as she flopped around on the floor. The possessed woman then started to grab my ankles and pull my bare legs out from under my robe. No one seemed concerned by her actions or the fact that my bare legs were exposed<sup>121</sup>. They all thought it was funny when she started hitting my hands and rubbing my face. She told me that I needed to raise my hands to the sky and say Amen. She searched for, found, and used perfume from all of the perfume bottles in the room. When the woman started slapping me as she was pawing at my face, I finally told Maryan that we needed to leave. We stood to go and for a brief moment I thought the woman was going to grab my legs again.

As we walked out into the hallway and shuffled through the pile of shoes for ours, the woman with the possessed woman and another old woman came out with us. The possessed one told me that I could find peace in Allah and then she walked away. The old woman looked on after the possessed woman and remarked that she was doing so much

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<sup>120</sup> At one point, I checked to make sure my phone was turned off and a few women near me accused me of trying to secretly record the session. After assuring them that I was not failed, I ultimately pulled my phone out of my bag and showed them. I also promised that I would not record anything without their permission.

<sup>121</sup> This is also despite the fact that they were concerned for the exposed bare legs of the possessed woman.

better now that she was coming to the dhikri. I asked her what she meant. “Well, she suffers. When she is here, she feels calmer.”

Maryan and I walked outside to wait for the taxi that was supposed to pick us up. It was dusk and the road we waited on was one of the more dangerous roads in Eastleigh. As we left the compound, a Somali man with a fresh gunshot wound on his leg was limping by. He asked us if we had any food or any way of helping him. Without hesitating, Maryan directed the man into the dhikr. “They will have food for you,” she told him. I asked her if that was true. She assured me that it was fine and that those women would take good care of the injured man.

The following day, I met with Sheikh Hussein again. This time, instead of going into the main house, where his wife and mother lived, we went into a different room, separated from the main apartment. We sat on foam mattresses on the floor. We talked about the differences between the Sufis and the Aqwaanis. We talked about the pillars of Islam again. In the middle of the interview, his mother, who I had just learned had only arrived from Somalia a few days earlier, called Hussein to the door and yelled at him for talking to me. She told him that it was dangerous to talk to me until I had become a Muslim. “Tell her to become a Muslim and then you can teach her about our religion and culture. Until then, don’t talk to her.” He said, “Yes, Yes, fine.” He closed the door and went back to where he was seated. “If the woman asks you, or if anyone asks you again, you just tell them you are a Muslim, ok?” I nodded.

I then asked him why he thought they were so concerned about my faith and why they were so upset during the dhikr. He told me that the Sufis in general were starting to

feel pressure<sup>122</sup> to discontinue their practices such as the dhikr due to the increased power and presence of the Aqwaanis. He told me how he believed the Saudi Arabian government and other governments and ideological groups had started proselytizing more aggressively and that many Sufis had started to worry about their own safety. He suggested that the women in the dhikr were simultaneously concerned for my well-being and for their own, and as I would be writing about them, they were worried that I might represent them in a way that was unflattering. He also told me how many people, particularly young people, had been abandoning these Sufi practices, and there was a general worry about the loss of a tradition that they believed was more true to what it means to be a Somali and a Muslim.

I asked him why he thought most of the women in the room were no longer wearing the baati and garbasar, but were, instead, wearing buibuis and jilbaabs. He explained that because one's religious affiliation could most readily be identified through his or her dress, many Sufis had opted to publicly wear more conservative clothing. This marked a very big change in the discourse about dress; early in my research I was regularly told that those individuals who wore the niqaab (the face veil) and the very billowy jilbaab and the burqa were not to be trusted because they could easily conceal immoral behavior (such as wearing mini-skirts, or even stealing from shops). Indeed

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<sup>122</sup> Later in the interview, Sheikh Hussein appealed to me to expose the Aqwaanis' practice of recruiting young people in the local mosques to fight on behalf of the Islamist groups in Mogadishu. He claimed that in such recruitment centers, young people were being "brainwashed" to fight. He pleaded to me to publish something in the newspaper that would expose this practice. I never confirmed with anyone that this indeed was happening, though I certainly knew many individuals who returned to Somalia to "protect" the land, religion and people from those individuals who were abusing it.

some of the very women who told me this early in my research, much later told me they preferred wearing the niqaab and jilbaab because it was truly modest<sup>123</sup>.

In spite of this, however, even those individuals who were not as welcoming to us during our visit to the dhikr, attendance and participation in the ritual remained for them a powerful devotional act. It also was a means for individuals to offer guidance to Maryan and all the other women present about how to interact with someone who is a non-Muslim. They were deeply concerned that Maryan work very hard to teach me of the importance of becoming a Muslim; Maryan's allowing me to remain idle in my potential conversion to Islam was itself problematic, even unethical (for her).

## **Conclusions**

Somalis have experienced and are enduring a massive society-wide moral breakdown in the form of the civil war and displacement. In the midst of all the whole-scale breakdown and cultural and religious change, individual Somalis are struggling to do the work of their own faiths. In the midst of a general state of heightened moral consciousness and anxiety, people are making defining and acting in ways that they believe are ethical. Iman, or faith, is the heart of this moral world and the ways individuals work out how to heal and rebuild their own faiths contribute to the society-wide moral project that is seen as vital to the survival and future of Somali society.

When you do not have an iman, the person has nothing in them and he has nothing to defend him or her from the things we experience. But the people who have iman in them, in their hearts they have xubullahi [love of God], waxabu rasullahi [love of the prophet]. The people with iman love things that are much greater – the signs of God. – Sheikh Ahmed

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<sup>123</sup> They would tell me they suddenly realized that the Aqwaanis had it “right” and that they would now require their own daughters to dress as such.



This attention by women to their ethical and religious obligations is not occurring in any kind of monolithic way, however. It is debated and of concern to most people I know in Eastleigh.

Rituals like the dhikr or how to respond to occurrences of spirit possession were situated discursively within an ideology of morality. People who participated in the various events or practices then, depending on how and by whom their behavior was being judged and analyzed, were in effect performing ethically (or unethically). Importantly, as this all occurred within a context in which there was not a consensus on what was moral, debates surrounding them, changes in behavior and the aggressive proselytizing as well as the general defensiveness all cumulatively contribute to establishing an insight into the ethical and metaethical discussions going on in Eastleigh today. Further, as we can see in this chapter, the strength of one's iman is very closely connected to their social, spiritual and mental health.

Importantly, unpacking these metaethical exercises, as well as building an understanding about what motivates individuals to participate in them, is vital to an exploration of Somali moralities in Eastleigh. Morality does not occur simply on an individual or, as is discussed in the previous chapter, a geo-spatial one. It exists and occurs in a physical, or socio-physical realm.

In the following chapter, I bring the geographic and individual spiritual aspects of morality in conversation together. I will also incorporate individuals' personal experiences with violence into the discussion, and explore how morality and metaethical definitions and exercises are fundamental aspects of these debates, and vital to building an understanding thereof. In examining the life story narratives several women articulated

to me with particular attention to morality, one can see how people are accounting for the changes, hardship, loss, illness, and violence in their lives.

## 5. Moral Journeys, Moral Narratives

### Introduction

As refugees, Somali women have needed to make sense of their experiences with emigration, flight, and displacement. Within the narratives of these experiences, suffering and violence is featured prominently. As I will show in discussion and analysis of the following narratives, the suffering and violence is heavily coded in terms of morality and not struggling physically (and importantly working toward such a goal) is discussed as a good, moral thing.

Since I started working with them in 2001, I have lent dozens of Somalis my copy of the book, Aman. Aman is the autobiography of a young Somali woman as she narrated her life story to Virginia Lee Barnes and Janice Boddy (1994). Through the book, Aman tells the story of her childhood and transition into adulthood as she lived in Somalia toward the end of the Italian colonial occupation. It is a story of her journey. Aman tells the reader (and listeners) about her experiences with illness, violence, betrayal, abuse and pain. She also shows us the joy, generosity and grace she experienced along the way. Without going into too much detail about the book, Aman undertakes various strategies in order to navigate through all the economic, political, social, and cultural structures and expectations in place. Her behaviors and attitudes, particularly toward her own sexuality, were striking given my knowledge of Somali culture. I expected most Somalis who read this book to disapprove of Aman and her story. What has surprised me, however, is that I

have never met a Somali who judges Aman for her transgressions. Rather, most Somalis I have given the book to, reflect on their own life stories in response to Aman's. They identify with her.

I brought a few copies of this book with me when I went to Kenya for my long-term fieldwork. As I had done before, once someone finished reading the book, I would ask him or her what he/she thought about it. Given the heightened moral consciousness in the Somali community in Eastleigh, I expected people to minimally take issue with Aman's use of her own sexuality as a tool of empowerment and at times manipulation. A couple of women told me that they found Aman a bit mischievous, but without exception, everyone who read it liked both the book and Aman as a person. They found familiarity in her struggle; the Somali story is one of hardship, pain and sacrifice. And it is about duty, ethics, and morality. As my friend, Mama Fadumo, told me one day, "We are Somalis. We don't expect comfort anymore. We expect hardship and struggle. And we survive." Aman may briefly have been a prostitute, but through it she was actually realizing her own moral personhood; she was still fulfilling her ethical responsibilities to her mother, her children, and her religion. She was a survivor, while other people around her revealed their own greed, immorality and corruption and therefore failed.

On the last pages of the book, she shows how her resilience has paid off. She is married to a kind, successful Somali man (rather than an Italian or other European man, whom she dates throughout the book), has enough money to support her mother and children from Tanzania, where she had moved, she has a successful business and is able to send her mother on Hajj. And in spite of the abuse she received from her father along the way, she vows to go to Mecca for him and once more for herself before she dies.

Aman's moral personhood is not in question. The hardship she endured, her resilience and grace in spite of violence and pain, the constant support she gave her family, and her consistent faith in Allah were all aspects of her own ethical work. Each of the moments she struggled because she was violated or betrayed could be considered moments of moral breakdown. Her journey was ultimately moral, even though it included many destructive, violent, and troubled decisions and experiences. Again, to borrow Throop's (2008) concept, Aman had changed her "mere-suffering" to a "suffering-for."

Like Aman, all of the Somali refugees I met in Eastleigh have experienced and witnessed human cruelty, atrocity and impunity. Similarly, many of them have also had to make decisions along the way that in any other circumstance or on any other kind of journey, they would probably have not made. Nevertheless, these choices, these lived worlds and experiences are, in fact, moral. The struggle itself is as universally Somali as it is moral. They remember their journeys and specific events along the way as moral ones; they highlight particular qualities in themselves and others as characteristics they realize through the journey process or enabled because of the transition. In doing so, they make their incredibly violent pasts relevant or rationalized in the present and meaningful as they create the future. Further, by moralizing experiences, the memories are less about the past than they are about the present and future. As my friend Khadija stated,

There is this proverb: "A person has to look forward to do something with his future." The thing is, we moved away from our country and came here for peace and work. The living is up to us. We have to do the struggling ourselves. No one else can do it for us. That is why women are moving forward without much suffering or worrying about the past. We have to struggle to survive. The Somalis are very hard working and ambitious. We will struggle to work.

## **A moral history of movement**

While I will spend a good deal of time in this chapter discussing Somalis as refugees, or forced migrants, it is important to note that Somalis have a long history of movement and migration that would not be considered “conflict migration,”<sup>124</sup> that is, Somali migration was (and is) not always a direct result of violent conflict and not always involuntary. Like Aman, Somalis have historically moved quite a bit. As nomadic pastoralists<sup>125</sup>, even after the rapid urbanization of parts of Somalia during colonialism, most Somalis thought of themselves as more at home in the very rural areas with their animals (see Andrzejewski 1993; Ahmed, A.J 1995, 1996; Ahmed S 2004; Bestemann 1996a, 1996b, 1998, 1999; Bestemann and Cassanelli 2003; Griffiths 2002; Horst 2006; Kapteijns 1994, 1999; Lewis 1961, 1993, 1994, 1998, 2002; Little 2003; McGown 1999; Mumin 1974; Samatar 1992; Samatar A 1994a, 1994b; Sheikh-Abdi 1981; Simons 1994, 1995).

In the symbolic hierarchy of occupations, nomadic pastoralism sits comfortably at the top. Indeed, several times during my interviews, people interrupted me to tell me that to really understand Somali culture, they would need to take me to the rural areas of Somalia, where we could move around with the animals. As Anisa told me, “The best thing for you to see would be the rural areas in Somalia. That is the real, good Somalia;” and Safiya declared, “I will take you to Somalia and you will see the animals. There you will come to know the real Somalia. We will take you to the rural areas. That is really nice.”

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<sup>124</sup> For a discussion of “conflict migration” see Gonzalez 1989, 1992.

<sup>125</sup> In southern Somalia, agriculture is also quite dominant. Nevertheless, pastoralism remains fixed in the Somali social imaginary as the most “authentic” and/or valuable of professions in Somali society.

More broadly, travel and migration carry great social weight. There is a long history of Somali fishermen migrating to different parts of the world, resulting in a large Somali community now permanently living in Wales. Similarly, there have been long-standing economic and intellectual connections between Somalia and various parts of the Middle East (Lewis 1998), explaining a strong presence of Somali men working in the oil industry in Saudi Arabia (Lewis 1994) and attending universities throughout the Middle East. Migration was of practical import. It was useful for the establishment of future trade networks and remittances coming to Somali communities as a result of labor migration were common (Lewis 1994; Rousseau, et al 1998).

Migration, historically, carried cultural capital as well. As Rousseau, et al (1998) noted, travel in a broad sense carried cultural meaning and weight as it was considered to be a “source of wisdom itself” (Rousseau, et al 1998:386), particularly for people living in Northern Somalia where the land was arid and trade connections to the Middle East well established.

A man who has traveled, a *wayo' arag*, is one who knows a great deal, has seen things, has lived. The longer and more varied the travels of a person who has faced the unknown, the greater the respect and social consideration conferred upon him through the Somali language. On the other hand, the term *marrdhoof*, used to describe a first-time traveler, connotes a general lack of life experience (Rousseau, et al 1998:386).

Migration is, indeed, central to the collective consciousness and myths of many Middle Eastern civilizations. While Somalia is not a Middle Eastern nation, it is a Muslim one and Muhhamad's flight from Mecca to Madina figures prominently in Qur'anic narratives about being Muslim. Likewise, Arab historian Ibn Khaldun wrote extensively about the connection between nomadism and civilization arguing that when society

became sedentary, it would become decadent (1382: Volume 1:247; and as cited in Rousseau, et al 1998:409).

Journeys and migration play a central role not only in how Somalis imagine themselves as Muslims, but as Somalis as well. In most of the myths of origin, the different clan families trace their beginnings to a journey made by an ancestor coming from the Middle East (usually Yemen) to the Somali coast and marrying a local woman. As these ancestors married local women, the different clan families were born<sup>126</sup>. More generally, nearly everyone I talked to referenced her life as a journey or path, and one for which Allah was solely responsible.

The migration story is one that is familiar and important to Somalis. The refugee journey narrative (and journey itself), while certainly different than previous Somali migration stories, still resonates soundly with socio-historical Somali moral imagination. Reconstructing their individual and collective histories, moralizing them, is I believe, a very important process for Somalis in Eastleigh.

### **Remembering as a Moralizing Process**

Remembering is a process of construction (Bartlett 1995 [1932]; Wertsch 1998, 2002). It is a process that is textually mediated. According to Wertsch, “Memory is more a matter of reorganizing, or reconstructing bits of information into a general scheme than it is a matter of accurate recall of the isolated bits themselves” (2002:7). Further, remembering involves the use of a ‘text,’ as defined by Wertsch as “the basic organizing

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<sup>126</sup> In a myth of origin retold by Abdi A. Sheikh-Abdi (1993), he explains the arrival by boat in Somalia of the exiled Muslim Prince, Jabarti. Upon landing in Somalia, he meets the young woman, Dombiro, who calls him “stranger” or Darood in her language. Dombiro, who was the daughter of Dir and the sister-in-law of Hawiye, and Darood are eventually married and they begin having children, birthing the Darood clan family line.



unit that structures meaning, communication, and thought” (14). The act of remembering by an individual, such as a refugee, constitutes a “mental transformation” of an event or an experience into a written or a verbal text (Wertsch 1998).

Through the act of remembering, a memory is called upon to provide a “usable past” (Wertsch 2002: 31) for the present and the future. Along these lines, then, memories serve refugees in their constructions of continuity within the self and the community in spite of Eastleigh being a legally questionable home for Somalis, amidst the insecurity of life in Eastleigh and in spite of Eastleigh being constructed as a place where authentic Somaliness and Somali morality can exist. Daniel Schacter, cited by Wertsch (2000) makes a point of noting “our sense of ourselves depends crucially on the subjective experience of remembering our pasts” (32).

For anthropologists and other social scientists studying memory, it is this subjective experience of remembering that is so interesting. According to Wertsch (2002), “They [anthropologists, historians and sociologists] begin with the assumption that memory is to be understood in terms of its role in rhetorical and political processes concerned with identity and a usable past” (32). For Sean Field (2001), “The problem is that people do not retain experiences but rather construct memories out of experiences<sup>127</sup>. And memories consist of a mixture of images, thoughts and feelings which are reconstructed and mediated in different ways” (127). He argues further that narratives and the retelling of memories can actually be healing; through narration of memory there is an elaborate and active (re)construction of self. “In the act of ‘storying their experiences’ into memory, people critically reflect and interpret themselves, others and the world. The ways in which people make interpretive sense of their lives, as

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<sup>127</sup> Though I also will talk later about how experiences are created out of memories.

demonstrated by the life stories presented, offer compelling insights into memory, identity and power relations” (131). Similarly, Elizabeth Colson (2003) writes, “Resettlement does not wipe out memory, but rather provides a medium through which it is reworked, and the memory of shared experience of uprooting helps to create new forms of identity” (9).

What makes memory so potent is through its transformation to a narrative. For Wertsch (2002), narratives are the cultural tools for remembering. Expanding on this, Wertsch articulates (citing MacIntyre) “MacIntyre sees the narratives we use to make sense of human action to come from a “stock of stories” from which any particular individual may draw. Rather than being part of some universal essence, they are part of the “cultural toolkit” that characterizes a sociocultural setting” (2002:57). Beyond a simple discussion of memory, by making experiences usable, people are mapping meaning onto specific aspects of their experiences (see also Cole 2001). I believe that this process is, at least for Somalis, a moral one. In the construction of specific kinds of narratives, and in the coding of certain experiences as good or bad, Somalis are contributing to the construction of moralities.

In his book, Yesterday, Tomorrow. Voices from the Somali Diaspora, Nuruddin Farah (2000) discusses the use of stories by Somali men in a refugee camp near Mombasa, Kenya. As he was early for an interview, he had the opportunity to observe a group of men drinking tea and discussing their flight to Kenya and the reasons behind it.

They exchanged tales manufactured in the rumour mills set up in exile. Taking turns they repeated the *tall tales* (emphasis mine) they heard. Patient with one another, they heard each other out as each produced counter-versions, made additions or incorporated his own deletions. I had been familiar with some of the tales. Even so, I felt no nearer to knowing which part of it had its origin in the apocryphal imagining of rumour-

mongers, and which part in the mansion of truth. ...Even if they did not make into the world's newspaper headlines, because they could not stand up in court, and even if they were without base, the fact remained that they provided Somalis with a sense of vindication, incriminating *others* as accomplices in the ruin of the country, as culpable (emphasis original) (10-11).

Demonstrated in this passage is the emotional significance of these “tall tales” as tools for reconstructing and making sense of an otherwise irrational civil war. This passage also illustrates what Catherine Riessman (1993) suggests about narratives. “Not merely information storage devices, narratives structure perceptual experience, organize memory, “segment and purpose build the very events of a life” (Bruner, 1987, p.15). Individuals become the autobiographical narratives by which they tell about their lives” (Riessman 1993:2). And later she states, “Respondents narrativized particular experiences in their lives, often where there has been a breach between ideal and real, self and society” (3). In other words, when there has been a moral breakdown or a moment when suddenly the moral world collapsed resulting in a disconnect between people's behaviors and the previously established sense of good and ought, individuals creatively reconstruct a working meaning, a usable past, or an improvised and rationalized narrative to allow it to work. So while some may suggest that Farah's men sharing tall tales were exercising their storytelling skills and nothing more, Riessman and others would suggest that the act of telling the story is critical for them as they made meaning out of their experiences with the war and forced migration.

Within the Somali community in Eastleigh, I believe that women and men are constructing usable pasts by coding them in terms of morality and moral personhood. Drawing on these new studies in the anthropology of moralities, though not discarding

previous theories, I believe that we can see in these narratives how Somalis are confronting both a conflict in value spheres, and a moral breakdown. Further, as they deal with these moments of breakdown, crisis, and conflict, and they make personally and morally usable their experiences. In doing this, they create socio-moral worlds more broadly. To illustrate this, I will present some case studies of individual Somali women and their narratives of their journeys to Eastleigh. Although I collected 68 life story interviews, I will focus specifically on 5 women here.

In the first case study, I introduce a woman in her mid 50s named Hawa. Hawa is a nurse-midwife at a local clinic in Eastleigh and she lives with her husband and her adopted son (nephew) in a room in a shared flat in one of the poorer areas of Eastleigh's section 2. I met Hawa through two friends, Amina and Zahra. Both women told me that everyone knew that Hawa was the best midwife in the area; she was gifted in both western biomedical and traditional knowledge and skills. Not only could she help a woman with her pregnancy and delivery, but she was also able to help women conceive children.

I will show how she extracts moral lessons from her own narrative and journey and in doing so, how she participates in a metaethical exercise of defining the moral in her experience. I believe that in her story, we can see how her experiences with violence, trauma, migration, and displacement are being couched in terms of morality. In doing this, I believe that Hawa is making usable her past. Moreover, I believe that because this process requires a constant reflexive dialogue between self and society, in her story we can observe how definitions of morality are both poetic and rational; that is, they are creative, embodied, sensorial, and they are rational and discursive.

## **Ethical work**

### ***Hawa “Justo”***

We entered a gated compound and were led by a young girl to Hawa’s room. As we approached, a large smiling woman came toward us. She took my right hand and kissed the top of it, then gave me her hand so I could do the same<sup>128</sup>. She greeted Amina and Zahra the same way, dismissed the small girl, and led us into her tiny room. She told us that she lived there with her adoptive son, for whom she had been caring since he was an infant. As if on cue, a 12-year-old boy entered with a black plastic bag filled with various soda bottles. Once we chose our sodas and settled in on the mattresses, Hawa began to tell me her story<sup>129</sup>.

“I am a Darood,” Hawa began. Amina and Zahra both nodded appreciatively<sup>130</sup>. She continued, “But I have never believed that clan should be important.” Hawa was from Mogadishu. Before the war began, she was a very successful and popular midwife. Back then, she explained, she was not trained biomedical midwifery, only in Somali traditional midwifery. But, she emphasized with a smile, she was still very popular throughout Mogadishu. “They called me “justo” in Mogadishu,” she beamed. I asked her what she meant. “Justo is Italian for ‘complete’,” she said. “I was called Hawa Justo

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<sup>128</sup> This is how Somali greet each other with great respect. Many of the women I met over the course of my research would greet me warmly, but would only touch me if they had a piece of their jilbaab or another cloth between their skin and mine. Many of them would simply place their hands together in front of their chest and smile/nod their greetings to me.

<sup>129</sup> Unlike most other women I interviewed, Hawa was actually willing to let me record her interview. Unfortunately, the recorder malfunctioned several times during the interview so I only have sections of the interview recorded. I took very thorough notes.

<sup>130</sup> The Darood were a clan-minority in Eastleigh, which was heavily dominated by the Habargidir, a sub-clan of the Hawiye. Siyaad Barre, the exiled president, was also a Darood. When the civil war began, the first line of antagonism was between Hawiye and Darood.

because I was good. I helped women all over the city; I went up and down to help these women have their babies. It was good. I was complete. I had a family, and children, and a good job. I prayed. Life was good then in Mogadishu.”

Toward the end of the 1980s, she started working for some of the international aid organizations, which were helping women around Mogadishu who had difficult pregnancies. Because of her work with the foreigners, and in concert with the heightened tensions and exaggerated senses of fairness and unfairness characteristic of socio-political life then, Hawa told me that some people were getting jealous. They assumed that she was financially benefiting from her connections to the foreigners. As she noticed certain tensions increasing both with regard to specific individuals attention to her as well as larger scale city-wide tensions, she acquired a non-functional weapon of sorts to place in her front window. She hung it as a warning to those people who were thinking about attacking her. Toward the end of 1990, however, the gun in her window proved to be an ineffective defensive tactic.

One day, before the civil war “officially” started, warlords broke into her compound where she lived with her husband and children, including her 7 day-old infant. They were Hawiye warlords, she told me. They were starting to target the Darood, and she believed they wanted the weapons and wealth they thought she had because of her city-wide connections. She suspected this violence was the early stage of the violence targeted toward Daroods because of the apparent favoritism Siyaad Barre had for his own clan. “I never thought clan should be very important,” Hawa told me, “but by the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, people were getting very jealous of each other.”

Absently rubbing her left upper arm with her right hand, Hawa started her story about the day everything crashed in and she was forced to leave her home. On that day, the mostly young men came in shooting their AK47s. She was shot twice (she showed me the scars from the bullet wounds on her arm and leg), her husband was shot and killed instantly, and those children who weren't killed right there fled the compound without their parents. Hawa was left for dead, with her infant laying on the ground beside her, wailing. They did not worry about the baby crying, Hawa told me; Rukia and Sahara clucked their disapproval. "They were bad people. They had no pride. They have no faith," Hawa stated.

Although the timing was a bit vague, Hawa told me that eventually people from her clan found her lying there and, realizing she was still alive, took her and her baby to Kismayo where many from the Darood clan were starting to flee. Hawa and her infant were nursed back to health in Kismayo, at a hospital run by both Somali and international doctors.

Once she had healed from her wounds, she told me that she knew she needed to start helping people again. As she started rifling through a large plastic bag filled with papers and drawings, Hawa told me how she began her formal training in biomedical midwifery. She then found and proudly showed me the many training certificates she had earned while she was in Kismayo. She had certificates from various large international agencies including several UN organizations and MSF. She told me how she befriended several wonderful doctors during her work and training with these organizations. One of them was a Dutch doctor who, so impressed with her work, had

organized for her a visa so she could move to the Netherlands and continue practicing medicine with Somalis living there. Hawa looked forward to moving.

Unfortunately, due to increasing insecurity in the area in 1995, the Dutch doctor had to return to the Netherlands before Hawa's travel arrangements were finalized. Other Somalis Hawa knew and worked with in the hospital were jealous of this opportunity, she told me. One Somali doctor in particular, a Hawiye man, told her that the Dutch doctor was trying to make her convert to Christianity; he did not actually respect or like Hawa. Later, when the Dutch doctor finally sent her the letter of invitation and money for travel expenses, because she could not read in Dutch, she was forced to return to the Hawiye doctor for a translation. He told her that it said that the doctor no longer wanted to help her go to Europe and that she should stay in Somalia. So she did not leave. Later, she showed the letter to another friend who could speak Dutch and the friend told her that the letter was actually giving her detailed instructions about who to talk to and where to go to secure the visa. This Somali man had lied and was trying to disadvantage her only because she was Darood and he is Hawiye and in spite of not actually gaining anything in the process.

“*Qabiil* (clan) is not important at all to me or to most people anymore. It is only certain people who still rely on it,” she explained to me. “That one was bad because he tried to harm me only because of my clan. Clan is only important to the ones who don't see each other as brothers and sisters in Islam.”

In 1999, Hawa finally left Kismayo because of the war between some of the different subclans of the Darood. “My friend here in Kenya forced me to come – she sent me money to come here. She was very worried for me.”



Now I live here in Eastleigh with this boy [her nephew] who is 12. I have taken him since he was a baby. I raise him like my own son and send him to school. My baby died, the one who was only newborn when I was shot. He died of malaria when he was just two, when we were still living in Kismayo. I live here in this room with my nephew and my husband. My husband is a Sheikh. He is an Aqwaani (Salafi) sheikh. He is a Kenyan Somali and a very good man. With him I have also started learning the Qur'an again. It is wonderful. I am learning so much about my religion. It feels very good. I know that God is taking care of me; it is he who sent those people to me in Somalia. And it is he who is helping me find a job here at Madina health clinic where I can help women with their pregnancies and to have babies. I also help women who are having problems conceiving children with some traditional herbs if they want. It is good.

Sometimes there are women who come in and they are about to have their babies and they don't have the money to come into the clinic to give birth. You have to pay sometimes 6000 shillings to even be admitted into the clinic, and that is the cheapest you can find around. Sometimes these women don't have money for this. So often I pay out of my own pocket so they can come in and give birth in a healthy way. The baby is healthier and so is the mother when they give birth in a place where someone can help. Then after the mother is resting in the clinic, I find out her clan and I go to the market looking for her people. When I find some, I usually take them to see her, to verify that she is who she says she is and then they raise the money for her to pay me back and to pay the balance and the clinic. They also bring food and things for the new mother. I have done this many times recently. I am always paid back because people see I am doing a good thing.

I don't need to go abroad anymore like I once thought. The abroad is not good. You can't be a good Muslim there. You can't be good. Some even say in the abroad they will tattoo you and force you to become a Christian. Here in Eastleigh we can be really good. We can learn. Even me; before I thought the Sufi thing was right and now I know that the Aqwaani are correct. I only worry for this small boy, but I know that God will take care of us and reward us in the ways he sees fit.

Here in Eastleigh, they have started calling me Justo again.

As I stated when I first introduced Hawa's story, I believe it offers insight into some of the ways Somalis are discursively and performatively reframing their experiences with violence, transition, flight and displacement into an ideology of

morality and moral personhood. Drawing on Zigon<sup>131</sup>, I would argue that the extended moment of moral breakdown began in Mogadishu when the warlords broke into her compound. At that moment, not only was Hawa physically injured and her family either killed or separated, but she also lost her justo-ness and she was left to die in a way that was wholly immoral. It is not a moral breakdown in the sense that she had to choose between two competing options, but rather she experienced a total, violent moral breakdown. The breakdown was so massive and so extended that it took a while for her find the freedom or space Laidlaw talks about to rationalize and reflect on a her experience, to recode it in a way that works for her, and to ultimately choose to behave in a self-consciously ethical way. By choosing “justo” again rather than clan or revenge or even trauma, she is doing what Zigon calls her ethical work and on a metaethical level is redefining the good and the bad. Indeed, as one can see through the course of her narrative, she explains certain acts of violence (both literal and symbolic) as (im)moral.

Drawing on Robbins’ discussion of morality then, although Hawa was engaged in ethical work (here a morality of reproduction) before the societal change and subsequent moral crisis, she experiences a heightened moral consciousness during and afterward. This is particularly obvious in how she attends to her religious responsibilities (which are no longer Sufi), and how she reframes her experiences with the actual violence that led to her flight in terms of a language of morality. By the end of her narrative, when she has once again achieved justo-ness, she is remarried (an important component of successful Somali female personhood), she has found truth in Salafism/Aqwaanism and is studying

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<sup>131</sup> Here, while I draw on Zigon, I believe the moral crisis or moral breakdown that occurs is far more of a crisis for Hawa than, for instance, choosing whether or not to lie in a situation.

the Qur'an every day, as well as fulfilling all of her obligations of piety and prayer, and she has found ways to help women across clan lines in her clinic.

Second, through her narrative, we can observe how Hawa positions Eastleigh at the center of a Somali moral geography. Hawa worries that dibadka is so morally polluted that not only could one easily stray from a properly pious and moral path, but also that there may even be people who forcibly tattoo a person in attempts convert them to Christianity. Kismayo and Somalia on the other hand are places rife with impunity; they are the locations and sources of the various moral crises and collapses. Eastleigh becomes then, the place where morality can be defined and maintained. It is where moral worlds and moral personhoods are realized and reconstructed. It is where Hawa became *justo* again.

Third, as Hawa tells her story, we can see how she relies on a language of morality to code and make sense of her journey and experiences along the way. The Somali doctor who betrayed her because she was of a different clan demonstrated that he was not a good Muslim or "brother in Islam." Further, he chose to use clan in a destructive way, rather than in productive, positive, moral way that could benefit people. The bullet wounds she showed me were more a reminder of the immorality and bad character of the people who shot her than of the actual experience of being shot. Allah was responsible for her fortune of being found by her kin, for her safe arrival in Eastleigh, and for securing a job in the health clinic.

Finally, if, as I argue following many scholars of morality, individual ethical acts occur at the intersection between self and community and that they are mutually constitutive, then as Hawa realizes her own moral personhood and tending to her iman

and as she rebuilds and makes usable her journey and her personal experiences with violence, through her performance of her ethical self, and through the ways she talks about helping others and reminding them of what it means to be a good person, she is participating in a dialogue and discussion about what it really means to be a moral person.

Further, by paying attention to how Hawa coded her experiences with the violence in terms of a language and ideology of morality and personhood, one can see how her suffering is transformed into a “suffering-for” thereby enabling her own violent and at times traumatic past to be part of her ethical narrative of self. When we left her small room, Amina and Zahra discussed for several minutes how Hawa is a really good person.

### **Idil**

Shortly after I started working with Osop, she announced to me that there was a woman in her building who wanted to talk to me and tell me her story. Idil had heard of my interest in women’s stories and she believed she had a particularly difficult journey story to Eastleigh that she wanted to tell. “I will tell you a real story. A good story,” Idil told me with a smile when I finally met her.

Idil was a beautiful 35-year-old housewife when I met her in 2007. She was married to a truck driver who, when he was not on a job, lived with her, five of their seven children, and Idil’s father, her cousin and her sister. Her 17-year-old daughter and her 4-year-old son both lived in Minnesota with some of her cousins. All together, ten

people lived full-time in their small apartment<sup>132</sup>, and there was a constant flow of people in and out of the apartment during the day.

The first time I went to talk to her, the power was out so we sat on foam couches in the semi-darkness with the front door and steel window guards wide open. Idil sat in the corner of the room holding her baby while her house-girls worked in the kitchen. After exchanging initial niceties she announced that she had heard that I was interested in the stories of Somali women. I nodded. “That is good<sup>133</sup>,” she said. “That is very good. No one hears our stories. They are good stories.”

Idil was born in a rural area outside Mogadishu in 1972<sup>134</sup>. Like all of her sisters and brothers, she moved to Mogadishu for schooling at some point when she would have been in primary school<sup>135</sup>. She stayed with her extended family in Mogadishu until she was 16 (in 1988) when she and four of her girlfriends made a pact to move to Kenya to find a man to marry. “There were no good men in Somalia then,” she told me with a mischievous grin<sup>136</sup>, “and everyone knew that there were good Somali men living in Kenya.” So she and her four close friends made the trip to Nairobi. At this time, the

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<sup>132</sup> Idil’s apartment was actually, for Eastleigh standards, rather large. It consisted of three rooms, a tiny kitchen, a bathroom and a toilet room. The entry room doubled as a sleeping area and a sitting area. Although ten people lived permanently in the apartment, there were anywhere between 2 and 10 people visiting, some for several days, most of the time.

<sup>133</sup> As with most of the women I interviewed, Idil did not permit me to record our conversation. As such, I took careful notes throughout our interview. After the interviews and conversations, Osop and I went to a local Somali restaurant where we went through my notes of the interview to make sure I remembered it correctly.

<sup>134</sup> As was the case with many of the Somalis I worked with, Idil was not exactly sure in which year she was born. She guessed she was approximately 35 when we met, which would mean that she would have been born in 1972.

<sup>135</sup> She could not recall the actual year she moved and had very little to say about her schooling at all.

<sup>136</sup> Everyone in the room laughed when Idil said that. One woman who was sitting in on the interview, listening to Idil’s story announced that there still weren’t any decent Somali men. This led to further laughter and nodding.

Kenya-Somalia border was not so closely patrolled<sup>137</sup>, so they arrived in Eastleigh with relative ease.

“It took me a full year to find, woo, and marry my husband. Some of the other girls gave up and went back to Somalia without men. But I found a good one and we married,” she beamed. Idil stayed with her husband in Eastleigh until 1990 when she returned to Mogadishu. Her husband went with her for the visit, but returned to Eastleigh after only a couple weeks. Idil remained in Mogadishu until the war broke out in Somalia. When the fighting drew very near to her home, she decided she needed to leave Somalia. She was very pregnant so it took her a few weeks to make the trip to the border.

When the war broke out in Somalia, the Kenyan border became much more closely patrolled than it had been on Idil’s first trip to Eastleigh. Even though she was married to a Kenyan-Somali man, and was far into her third trimester, Idil was arrested at the border for crossing into Kenya illegally. She told me she did not have the kind of money with her to bribe the border police, so she was held in prison for twenty days. She went into labor while she was still in prison. Although they sent her to a local hospital, because she was a prisoner, she told me, she was not treated very well. She had a very difficult labor and delivery. “I nearly died because they mistreated me,” she told me, “but there was a kind man who came in and read the Qur’an to me while I was still there. He was not even my clan. He was just a good man.” Six days after she had her baby, Idil was brought to court where she was found guilty of illegally immigrating to Kenya, and she was deported to Somalia with her infant. She and her baby were left in a tiny border

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<sup>137</sup> At this time, the Kenya-Somalia border was almost a myth to Somalis in the area. In addition to the fact that Northeastern Kenya was widely considered part of the greater Somali nation (which was arbitrarily divided by colonial powers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century) and therefore not distinct in any way, in the late 1980s the border itself was not as closely policed.

town with no money and no support. So she found some people from her clan who agreed to help her for a little while. “That’s when the Somalis are good. If they know that you are family then they have to help you.”

She stayed there for a few weeks while her daughter gained some strength and she figured out how to “sneak” back into Kenya. When she finally re-crossed the border, she was still very weak from the pregnancy, and so she stayed in the home of the man who had read the Qur’an to her in the hospital. While she was in his house, she tried to contact her husband in Nairobi. A week after arriving in Kenya, Idil’s husband sent a young woman whom he knew to help her and the baby travel back to Nairobi. The girl was quite helpful, Idil acknowledged, but as she told me, it was still too soon for her to do a lot of traveling. The baby was still too young and she was still too weak from the difficult labor. So Idil, the girl and the baby all stayed with the kind Somali man and his family until Idil was strong enough to move back to Nairobi. It took two months. “I will never forget that man. He is a good man. His family is good.”

In Eastleigh, she was eventually able to lead a very “strong” life, she said. She told me about how she is still married to the man she found when she first came to Kenya as a young girl “with a silly pact.” She has had 7 children and told me she felt blessed by all of them. She now lives in a relatively quiet building surrounded by friends and family and she had discovered, what she called the “truth” in Aqwaani Islam. Nevertheless, she says,

Life here in Eastleigh is very hard. It is too expensive, the police harass us all the time, and we can’t afford to go to the hospital or send our children to school. Somalia seems like a better option, but there is still too much fighting there. Allah is the only one who can help us now. Here in Eastleigh, though, people have really learned about their religion. Here we are learning from the Aqwaanis (Salafis). We are learning about our

religion. The Sufis never spread the word like they do. And they grease over the laws of the religion. I think the Aqwaanis are better. It is like common sense. You realize what is right. I used to be a Sufi, but now I am leaning way over to the Aqwaani side. The Aqwaanis are also better with their daughters; they are strict with how they dress.

She explained how although Eastleigh was not her country, at least here she could be safe and learn how to be a better Muslim. She struggled along her way, but she survived. She now only worries most about her children in the abroad. “In Minnesota there is no religion or culture and my youngest only cries when I talk to him on the phone.” She said that although her cousins were taking good care of the children, it was still difficult to ensure that they were being raised properly, particularly in that setting. Eventually her daughter would get a job and help support Idil and her family, she said. Someday however, she told me that she would like to bring her kids back to Eastleigh to be near her, to make sure they were going to be good people. More so, someday, she hoped she would be able to bring the whole family back to Somalia.

Like Hawa Justo, Idil experiences a moral breakdown in the form of the war and forced migration, though she she did not have (or tell) the same kind of trauma/violent story that Hawa told. Like Hawa, she is forced to rebuild her life in exile in Eastleigh. Idil moralizes her story not in terms of a breakdown, however, in spite of her struggle with the border police, but rather, in terms of generosity. She shows how during moments of moral and personal crisis, she and other people make choices that reflect new value spheres; the man who helped her had no clan obligations to do so. Following Laidlaw, then, we see Idil reflect rationally on her migration to Eastleigh as one that has brought her in touch with a correct form of Islam, here Salafism/Aqwaani Islam. She realizes her own ethical personhood through her satisfaction of specific aspects of Somali moral



womanhood; she is married and has children whom she is raising with discipline and she has moralized her own journey narrative to make it usable for her current person.

Idil's success at reframing her experiences to linger on the good and moral rather than on the suffering is itself evidence of strong faith. That she was working on her faith through this process is evidence to me and to others that she is a truly moral and good person. Struggling, importantly "struggling-for," is a powerful way of reframing experiences with life experiences that are difficult.

Sometimes, however, as in the next case I present, reframing one's experiences in terms of a "suffering-for" is not always very easy. Zamzam's story shows how reaching the state of "suffering-for" can be harrowing.

### **Zamzam**

When I met Zamzam, she was one of the few women I met and interviewed who showed possible symptoms of psychological trauma. While I will return to a discussion about how she is managing and recoding the violence in her life in Chapter 6, I will first show how her memory of her experience and her journey to Eastleigh is part of her own moral project, and how, at least provisionally, she is starting to suffer-for.

Zamzam was always holding her baby when I saw her; if the child was awake, Zamzam bounced her on her knees and frequently offered the child her breast for milk. Throughout most of our conversations, she told her stories looking directly at her baby and only occasionally glanced my direction. She told me how happy she was to have this baby. With the exception of her eldest son who finally joined her in 2005, all of her

children from her previous marriage were still living with their father in Somalia.

Zamzam was a 37 year-old mother of five children when I met her in Eastleigh in 2007.

“Life was easy for me in Mogadishu,” Zamzam told me in one of our first conversations. “Before the war, I only had to be a wife. I took care of the children and I raised them to be good people. They loved me a lot. They still do, and they miss me. That is why this boy here has come to Eastleigh. He did not want to be apart from me.”

I used to visit my father’s house often after I was married, and also after I was divorced. I still lived with the children’s father then. Their father was not a good man. He abused me and called me names. He was not a good man. When we divorced he told me that I could not take my children. His new wife would take care of them. I knew that would not be good. That woman would not take care of them because she will only take care of her children. So I stayed in one of the houses on the compound to take care of the children. Zamzam worried about her children who were still staying with their father.

“One day I went and visited my father. My uncle was there. So was my brother.”

Zamzam’s eyes started to tear. She stared at her daughter as she bounced her on her knee.

We remained silent for a while. Then she untied the headscarf she was wearing, and pushed the right side of it back slightly revealing a misshapen right ear. Holding her giggly baby with her left arm, she rubbed her ear with her right.

They killed my brother in front of me, those men. We were on the veranda and my uncle came up to us. We went to greet him. And the men came in and started shooting everywhere. They killed my brother right there. Right there next to me. They shot me; you see, they shot my ponytail right off and it also took my ear. They shot my ear off. They shot my brother. My brother was very young. That was in 1996. It was in the neighborhood called Barmudo<sup>138</sup> in Xamar [Mogadishu]. They called it Barmudo because of all the blood. Everyone lost many people there. Some lost 4 or even 5 people in a short time. It was a bad place. Those people just shot everyone. Those people who fight are against the religion.

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<sup>138</sup> Barmudo is the Somali name for Bermuda. They named this neighborhood after the Bermuda Triangle, because if you went in there, you would likely not come out alive.

Zamzam told me that since she arrived in Eastleigh in 2003, her life had become a bit better. She was married to a new man, who was kind, she told me. They had a new baby and her eldest son had come to live with her. Her husband reads the Qur'an with her, and that, she says, is very helpful and good. Even though her husband doesn't work, he is a good man because he reminds her of her faith and together they read and learn.

Her new husband reminds her regularly that she is not alone in her experience with the violence of the war. Clearly Zamzam struggles with the moment of moral breakdown when her brother was shot. By working with her husband to recode this experience as something she can and does share with other Somalis, she is in the process of making it usable in her present. More so, she is making it usable by framing it in terms of a specific Somali moral cultural value: struggle.

Further, by juxtaposing the life she is able to give to her children in Eastleigh with the perceived precariousness and danger of life for her children in Somalia – not because of the war per se, but because of the step-mother's neglect of her children – Zamzam reflexively codes her flight to Eastleigh as one of potential motherhood. Zamzam also shows, through her narrative, that in working on her faith she is not only filling the reservoir, but is also behaving ethically.

Like Zamzam, in the next case study I show how Mama Fadumo is also reframing her own struggle and suffering in terms of a language of morality. Although her own struggles do not feature the same level of violence that are central to Idil, Zamazam, or Hawa's narratives, struggle is still central. For Mama Fadumo, the struggle itself, and significantly, her resilience amidst it, was a source of great pride; she credited her resilience to her faith and her family. Again, while she was reluctant to linger on her

experiences with violence, which she dismissed often as something all Somalis had experienced, she was quick to point out the injustice of absentee husbands/fathers and of places where in spite of absentee fathers, women were not permitted to work outside the home. She was particularly critical of anyone who shirked their obligations and responsibilities toward their families.

### **Mama Fadumo**

Mama Fadumo, a member of the prominent Habargidir subclan of the Hawiye (the largest clan in Eastleigh), is my oldest Somali friend in Eastleigh. We met through a mutual friend who was also tutoring Fadumo's children. Fadumo is the mother of five children<sup>139</sup>. Kuwait, her eldest daughter currently lives in the Netherlands and Asha, now married and with two young children, lives in a different apartment in the same building as Fadumo (though Fadumo pays for all of Asha's expenses). Faduma's other three children all live with her in her small apartment<sup>140</sup>. Over the now almost five years I have known Fadumo, she has never spent much time talking to me about Mogadishu when she was forced to leave. In nearly every interview and conversation I had with her, however, she has emphasized how perfect Mogadishu was before the war, how much she struggled

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<sup>139</sup> Her eldest son was killed shortly after the fighting started in Mogadishu. Beyond that information, she never talked about him or about the events leading to his death. Her description of Mogadishu never included reference to the blood and violence that marred its perfection when the war started.

<sup>140</sup> Over the course of the time I knew her and visited her regularly, however, Mama Fadumo was constantly hosting anywhere between 5 and 12 additional friends and family members and fostered no fewer than two orphans. Most of the family she took care of had come to Eastleigh seeking medical assistance. She joked with me several times that her home (and the home of her niece, who lived in the same building) was actually a refugee camp. Fadumo took great pride in being able to assist so many people, even though it frequently took a toll on her physical and financial health and was often a source of great stress and worry.

on her journey to Eastleigh, and how in Eastleigh, while things are not perfect, she is able to survive.

When the war broke out in Somalia, Fadumo moved with her eldest children, Kuwait, Asha, and Ahmed, to Saudi Arabia where her husband was already living and working. They lived there, with her husband for a while. She had her youngest two girls while she was living there, but as she describes it, grew restless because she could not work.

I was a refugee there but I did not have the proper papers. I was a refugee, but I could not work. [She is interrupted by her niece who says, “She used to go to the rich people’s houses and beg.”] Anyway, we could not live in Saudi Arabia. My children could not go to school there and I was not working. They would not let me work. And then my husband took another wife. So we moved to Nairobi. We work here. We are refugees here in Nairobi. We work. When we started we planted tomatoes and sold them. We sold clothes and we sold tomatoes. We planted beans. We sold milk. We sold cooking oil. It was business. Because you need something to eat. If you don’t work, what will you do? Will you become a thief? No. What will you be, tell me? Nobody is going to help you. You have your energy to get things done. We don’t have any documents in Kenya. It’s not our country. We are refugees in this country. We should take advantage of Kenya. It is a good country. God has kept us safe here. It’s people and public are good and you can live with them.

Later in this same conversation, when describing how she survived at the beginning, Fadumo emphasizes how much Somalis help each other.

If today my shop was empty, a relative would fill it for me. Nobody can live here directly<sup>141</sup>. It’s friends and family helping us, from here and abroad. People in the abroad, for example my daughter, send money each month. My daughter sends me \$200 each month to help out. We believe in helping each other out. In Nairobi, if we [were] not helping each other or not getting any support or not getting a shoulder of support from other people, then we would not be able to live here. That’s how Somalis are. If I get a cup of tea, I would not take it first. I would give it to you first. Now at my house, apart from my children and me, there are at least ten other people living with us. They are people who fled, or the children who are

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<sup>141</sup> By “directly” she means “on your own” or “without the help of family and friends.”

related to our family or friends who are still there. Every child comes to me after having been on these streets for ten or fifteen days. When they come to me, what am I supposed to do? I take them home. Now if she comes to us to live we will take her home and she can live with us and our children will call her aunt.

Over the five years I knew Fadumo in Eastleigh, she brought her ailing father to live with her until he died, she has hosted several “cousins” and “aunties” as they underwent various medical procedures, waited for resettlement, and looked for jobs in Eastleigh. She has fostered a minimum of two orphan girls at any given time, and is has consulted with local Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) interested in assisting the women and children living in Eastleigh. She has done this without her husband, who, as far as Fadumo still knows, still lives in Saudi Arabia with his second wife and their children. Like many Somali women living in Eastleigh, she personally places a great deal of emphasis on both the struggle to personally survive and also on being able to work and support her family, friends and, community. Mama Fadumo, like Zamzam, moralizes her past in terms of struggle and resilience. She is choosing to code these experiences with the Somali cultural value of enduring and triumphing over struggle, and she prioritizes the hard work and generosity she has used to accomplish this.

While Mama Fadumo emphasizes her independence from her husband in the ways she survives and lives an ethical and faithful life, others place more emphasis on surviving the despair they endure and must overcome when their world is changed when their husbands leave or divorce them. For many Somalis, this is quite common. In the next case study, I will show how a young woman configures her narrative not only in terms of her divorce and subsequent grief, but how she manages this grief in a way that is ethical for her.

## Istar

Istar's way of experiencing her journey to and within Eastleigh is largely colored by her divorce, gender, and her own perceptions of what that divorce means. Again, like many of the women I spoke with, she was reluctant to talk about the specific moments of violence that compelled her to finally leave Somalia. Nevertheless, I believe her journey narrative remains one about aspects of moral personhood and morality more generally.

Istar is a 32-year-old divorced mother of one daughter, though she is also the foster mother of an 11-year-old boy and takes care of her ailing mother<sup>142</sup>. She moved to Eastleigh in 1993 from Kariokor, a market area which neighbors Eastleigh,<sup>143</sup> after she ran into and later married a friend whom she knew in Galgacyo, a town northeast of Mogadishu, somewhat near the Ethiopian border. She had only been in Nairobi a couple of months when she reconnected with him. Istar had intended on moving to Saudi Arabia or Italy to work so that she could support her elderly mother in Somalia when the war broke out. Because she did not have time to secure the appropriate documents, she fled to Kenya instead.

She discussed her experiences in Mogadishu and her journey with near disinterest. When she started talking about life in Eastleigh since 1993, however, she became much more animated.

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<sup>142</sup> Istar's mother, although very sick, claimed to be an angel and therefore was on a fast-track to heaven. During the interview with her daughter, she interrupted several times to tell me that she was holy and that people regularly came to her for advice and to be around someone who is holy. When I asked Osop what she thought about this, she told me that she thought the old woman was crazy and just wanted attention. Later in the interview, Istar told me that her mother was still very traumatized because of the war. She said that she moved from her previous apartment, which was on the top floor of a very tall building, because she worried that someday her mother would be so startled by the sound of the gunshots in the street and jump out the window on accident.

<sup>143</sup> Istar made this distinction several times very clearly.

I learned how to eat miraa<sup>144</sup> here. When I first came here, I was shocked when I saw women eating it. It was just not done in Somalia. Now I am one of those women. I started chewing out of jealousy. I noticed my husband was distracted and suspected that my man was seeing another woman who chewed. Or at least I thought he must be leaving the house to chew. I learned how to chew so that I could chew with my husband and he would not leave me. I learned but my husband left me for another woman who chews anyway. My man went to another woman so I needed something for my jealousy. I was alone for the first time. I chewed alone for the first time too. Before I chewed with that old lady.<sup>145</sup> I never go to the healing sessions. I don't go to a sheikh for healing. Whenever I am feeling sick or sad, I read a few verses of the Qur'an. When I feel really bad, I will go into my room, recite a few verses, put on some dighri music and chew miraa. That makes me feel calm and better. I am a very strong Sufi. I used to go on Fridays to the dighri, but since my mother and this boy have come here, I can't. I have to take care of them. But I do read some verses when I pray.

I don't want another Somali man. I am still angry that one left me. My mother asked her husband for a divorce because her husband married another woman without her consent. Divorce has increased so much [since the war]. You will meet a 16-year-old girl who is already divorced. Married women who have already raised their children are getting divorced. It is terrible. After the war, there are no jobs, no country, so the financial problems have started. The mother is screaming to the father that the child is hungry. The fathers love the kids, but not as much as the mothers, so they leave. Some women divorce their husbands because they do not want to be widows. The men are the problems. They are the ones who are irresponsible. And then there are the youth. Back then, if a boy was into a girl, he would tell his family and the two families would do the wedding properly. Now there are secret weddings and divorces. Teenagers are doing it. There is no government, no courts, no rules to reign in the children. There are too many idle teenagers who have no jobs or school to occupy their attention. So they are occupied with dating and they rush the marriage.

For Istar, a personal moment of crisis came after she fled Somalia and was living with her husband in Eastleigh. Her crisis came when she thought her husband was cheating on her. Her choices were, she believed, to chew miraa (a morally reprehensible habit) or to lose her husband to someone else who did. She chose from two equally rationalized, albeit

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<sup>144</sup> Miraa is what qat or khat is called in Kenya. It is a plant chewed all over East and North Africa, and the Middle East, known for its effects as a stimulant, roughly akin to coca leaves.

<sup>145</sup> By "that old lady," Istar was referring to an elderly woman in her building who also chews regularly.



undesirable, value spheres and in so doing was personally participating in these new metaethical projects characteristic of life in Eastleigh.

## **Discussion**

After experiencing intense violence and war, many psychologists or therapists would say that one needs to be able to work through their experiences with the violence so that they can create a coherent life narrative that flows from past to present. They need to make their pasts usable. For the women I introduced in this chapter, making their experiences with their pasts usable entailed a highly moralized discourse, even though they did not always highlight the same kinds of moralities.

It is also important to point out that each of these women sought me out to tell me their story. In this way, these women's stories were forms of testimony. Each one at different points stressed the need for women's voices to be heard in narratives about what Somalis are experiencing. While they were not formal or legal testimonies, per se, they do engender some of the characteristics and goals of testimony. Beyond simply making their own pasts usable, they were consciously relaying their own stories to me in a way in which they hoped to inform and shape broader understandings about and interactions with Somali experiences with war.

In his work about the violence in Sri Lanka, E. Valentine Daniel (1996) underscores the value of words and testimony in uncovering silenced domains of experience in the face of suffering. Similarly, in her work with women testifying in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, Fiona Ross (2003) points out how by looking at not just the testimonies women are giving on the stand but what is also left

out in the course of the testifying, one can observe multiple levels of society, social membership and experience.

In each of the narratives recounted above, the women with whom I talked situated themselves within specific economic, political, religious and social contexts and relationships. At each stage, when they recounted a moment of intense pain, suffering, or violence, their experiences became social and moral ones.

In the next chapter, I will present cases of individuals, who though they may be now working on their moral personhood with specific attention to their faith and refilling their iman, they have struggled more extensively and deeply than those individuals I present in the case studies in this chapter. Importantly, in Chapter 6, I describe one of the ways one's inattention to her iman and moral personhood can lead to the development of a local idiom of distress called *buufis*, which is according to every individual I met only diagnosed or identified in those individuals who are neglecting their faith. Further, as suffering from *buufis* is believed to be a consequence of neglecting one's ethical and pious responsibilities, it is locally being used as a way of articulating critique and judgment of individuals who exhibit behaviors that are more broadly deemed unethical.

## 6. Moral Madness

*“Islam helps with everything. I don’t go to a doctor, I only pray and I feel better.  
The ones who don’t go to madrassa or don’t pray have buufis.”*

### Introduction

Idioms of distress (Nichter 1981), the local conventional modes of expression used to convey the experience of suffering, have been extensively written about in the medical and psychological anthropology literature (Csordas 1996; Farmer 2003; Hinton 2009; Scarry 1985). This research has been heavily influenced by the now widely accepted assertion that western models of anxiety and distress as outlined in such manuals as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) used by the American Psychological Association, frequently fall short when they attempt to capture the subtleties inherent in etiologies of health and wellness worldwide. (see Hinton and Good 1985, 2009; Kleinman 1986, 1988; Lester 2009; Littlewood 1990, 1992; Lock 1987).

In Nichter’s original article about idioms of distress (1981), he suggested that anthropologists and transcultural psychiatrists were placing insufficient attention to questions about *why* different groups express distress in culturally specific ways, favoring instead descriptions of the cultural modes of distress (1981; 2010:403). Through his research, Nichter

came to realize the social ramifications of expressing and interpreting distress in specific ways, not just for the person suffering, but for his or her household, in keeping with such factors as moral identity, costs of treatment and so on. [His] research also led [him] to see just how crucial it was to consider the response or lack of response (itself a response) of significant others (e.g., household members, practitioners) to an

individual's display of distress and the manner in which feedback (or lack thereof) influenced the experience and expression of distress in a recursive fashion (2010: 403-404).

Nichter goes on to remind us that idioms of distress are dynamic and ever-changing, and that they are socially meaningful ways of expressing distress in socially significant contexts. "They are evocative and index past traumatic memories as well as present stressors, such as anger, powerlessness, social marginalization and insecurity, and possible future sources of anxiety, loss and angst" (Nichter 2010:405).

In this chapter, I discuss one such local idiom of distress among Eastleigh Somalis, called "buufis," which I roughly translate as 'a mental state of dis-ease due to an excessive desire to go abroad'. I argue that buufis crystallizes the Eastleigh Somali experiences of suffering and insecurity; it becomes a lens through which individual Somalis in this community (when they are not fulfilling their obligations of moral personhood and piety) enact and possibly live their memories and experiences with violence, betrayal and insecurity. More clearly, as my data suggest, the majority of individuals in this community who experience *buufis* are thought to be those who neglect their moral personhood; that is, they are believed to become stricken with *buufis* because they have not been properly tending their moral inclinations and actions. Importantly, however, based on how *buufis* was used in everyday conversations and used frequently as a way of criticizing the behavior of individuals who were thought to be shirking their moral and religious responsibilities, it is not only a bodily condition. As I will show, the idiom of *buufis*, when used to describe someone (or his/her behavior), indexes that person's poor moral personhood or unethical behavior.

*Buufis* has generally been defined by Somalis in Eastleigh as a form of madness as a result of an intense, perhaps even myopic desire to go abroad. When left unchecked or advances too quickly, it can lead to various physical and mental symptoms, such as restlessness, an inability to sleep or eat (or eating and sleeping too much), social withdrawal, talking to oneself, high levels of restlessness and worry, and in its most severe cases, can result in – anecdotally at least – the person’s psychological collapse as most frequently evidenced by a stripping down naked and running around as such in public. In a group interview with ten women about *buufis*, one young woman explained to me “the person who has *buufis* is someone who is crazy; his mind is not settled. He is here, but his mind is elsewhere.” This statement was corroborated repeatedly over the course of my interviews. Understanding *buufis* as a spiritual and mental condition allows us to observe how mental health, morality, and life in a permanently temporary Diaspora all intertwine.

Understanding *buufis* as an idiom of distress, wherein someone suffering has neglected their ethical responsibilities of piety is particularly salient in that most Somalis define proper moral personhood vis-à-vis their self-identification as Muslims. Good or proper personhood is performed (and observed) through virtuous acts and discipline. I believe this argument is important in a discussion about *buufis* and other issues related to health and healing because of the relationship between mental and spiritual health and a strong faith (*iman*); individuals who suffer from *buufis* and other mental/spiritual illnesses do so because their *iman* is not strong; it is “light.” Individuals with a light *iman* did not attend to their duties as Muslims and moral persons and are therefore susceptible to temptations, to doubt, and to a loss of a moral sense of what is right and what is wrong.

Likewise, for a person to recover from *buufis*, she must attend to all her moral responsibilities of piety, modesty, family, faith and morality. Most specifically, she must seek assistance from a religious healer because her problem is one related to her *iman*, not her mind.

During another interview about *buufis*, one of the young women present told me a story about a young woman who is currently in the hospital, suffering from *buufis*.

There is this woman right now who is in the hospital because of her *buufis*. She stopped eating and sleeping and only talks to herself. She is in the hospital now and the doctors are helping her with the eating and sleeping part, but she is still not being cured. Her *buufis* are very bad. When they release her, she will go back to her old habits.

I asked the woman, “So if I were going to write a report about *buufis* to explain to the doctors how to treat the woman, what would you tell me to write down?” The woman replied,

First, he needs to give the person appetite inducing drugs and sleeping pills so they can sleep at night. Then someone needs to advise them and remind them to have faith. There is a Sheikh Buufis<sup>146</sup>, though none of us have ever had *buufis* that bad. None of us were ever that damaged. But many people see him. He asks them questions and then advises them to go back to the religion. They need to strengthen their *iman*.

Buufis is locally understood to be an illness, therefore, which is completely preventable through proper faith and pious exercises and behavior and is only truly treatable through a return to faith.

“*Buufis* comes from the word that means to spray – anything at all to do with “to spray, spraying and blowing air,” Canab informed me one day as she made sure I ate the entire plate of spaghetti she had just served me. *Buufis* comes from the Somali word

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<sup>146</sup> Unfortunately, I never was able to talk to this Sheikh Buufis. I asked many people where and how I could get in touch with him, but although many people claimed to know of him, no one seemed to know how to find him.

“*buufi*” which means to blow into or inflate (see Horst 2006; Zorc & Osman 1993). For anthropologist Cindy Horst, who has done extensive work among Somalis living in the Dadaab refugee camps in Northeastern Kenya, the word literally refers to air, which in the Somali language can be used metaphorically refer to a longing or a desire for something specific (Horst 2006). There is some debate about whether *buufis* existed before the war, but it is now found all over the world. In a simple Google search for “*buufis*,” tens of thousands of links popped up including Somali-made videos about the dangers of *buufis* (and by extension, the abroad) and the humor of those suffering from *buufis*, aid documents and mental health journal articles discussing the presence of *buufis* and the need to learn how to treat those suffering from *buufis*, and casual jokes about and/or criticisms of Somali public figures in blogs and chatrooms who now exhibit signs of *buufis* (i.e. “Don’t listen to him, he clearly only has *buufis*.”).

*Buufis* has obviously been broadly defined, used and recognized, often with a touch of sarcasm and humor by many people who know or work with Somali communities all over the world. Scholars and mental health practitioners working with Somalis around the world have written about it and it seems to have rather flexible and contextual meanings. In some of the mental health literature coming out of London about the Somali community, *buufis* has been used to refer specifically to the sadness senior adults experience because of being separated from their families (Bhui, et al 2006). In this and other literature coming from research within various diasporic communities around the world *buufis* seems to be broadly used as a term roughly meaning depression, a more general sense of “not feeling good (Bhui et al 2006) and anxiety (Mölsä, et al 2010). Indeed, Mölsä, et al (2010) found that in Finland, what Finnish biomedically

trained doctors identified as mental disorders, Somalis themselves usually interpret them as spiritual and/or social problems (most commonly named *buufis*) and turn to Islamic means of treating the problems.

In her work in the Dadaab refugee camp in Northeastern Kenya, Cindy Horst (2006) observes four contexts in which *buufis* was referred to or defined: 1) as someone's hope, longing, desire or dream for resettlement abroad; 2) resettlement itself; 3) the people who long to go overseas; and 4) the madness that sometimes occurs when resettlement does not happen. While Horst sees *buufis* as a potentially bad thing (i.e. when madness occurs) she insists that *buufis* is a kind of survival strategy in Dadaab. She believes it is a survival strategy because it provides a framework through which individuals can make sense of their experiences with uncertainty of their future resettlement in a context that is emotionally and physically quite difficult.

Like Horst, Rousseau et al (1998) desire to look at some of the non-pathological qualities of *buufis* in Somali communities living in Ethiopia. They draw parallels between contemporary *buufis* and the more traditional role that travel for economic, religious and cultural reasons has played in Somali culture. They assert that by situating *buufis* in this context, Somalis make this waiting period in exile (usually in border countries to Somalia such as Ethiopia and Kenya) more socially meaningful. Further, they argue that by substituting the dream of travel with actual travel, Somalis are able to survive this otherwise uncertain period of time.

Within the Somali community in Eastleigh, there is a somewhat equally flexible way to use or diagnose *buufis*. Indeed, perhaps some of the variation in definition of *buufis* has come from the different functions the concept is filling and has filled.



According to several of the women I spoke with in Eastleigh, the first time they heard the word *buufis* was in the early 1990s. Below, Rodo talks about how definitions of *buufis* have changed since she first heard of it.

The first time I ever heard about *buufis* was in 1993 when I was in Somaliland. Back in those days when I asked about it, I was told that it referred to someone who was kind of crazy – not someone who is totally mad, who has taken off all their clothes and is running around – but just slightly crazy. Now it refers specifically to going abroad – like the JVA<sup>147</sup> thing. Before it could refer to anyone who was a little crazy and hasn't taken their clothes off – that is pure crazy. Before [the people who were purely crazy] were taken to the mental hospital. It was a long time ago – in 1993. People used to use *buufis* to describe someone who was slightly crazy – now it is just the love for the abroad.

Likewise, Safiya states,

*Buufis*, back in the days was known as madness. That was how we knew it back in the days. Now *buufis* is the people who want to go to the abroad. *Buufis* is [because you want] something you don't have. It is something you need but can't have.

*Buufis*, for many in Eastleigh, closely resembles what Fartun described:

[People with *buufis*] are just different. They will be thinking too much [about going abroad], absent-minded and won't be changing. It is like they are traumatized; they talk to themselves, and are withdrawn. Some of these people do nothing but try to get abroad. They wake up very early and go to JVA and sit around there and just waste their day. They don't work because they can't do anything except try to go abroad.

*Buufis* is a particularly useful domain for this kind of moral work, I argue, *because* it stems from the desire to go abroad. Life in Eastleigh is marked by a great deal of uncertainty and insecurity, particularly as most Somalis living there are doing so illegally. There are also ongoing risks of violence and injury, of abuse at the hands of the

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<sup>147</sup> JVA: Joint Voluntary Agency, the non-governmental refugee processing agency that does pre-screening interviews for the US State Department with individuals seeking refugee status and resettlement into the United States. It is important to note here that although JVA is commonly used to describe all and any individual working to screen and interview refugee individuals for resettlement throughout the world, JVA *only* interviews those individuals interested in resettlement to the United States.

police, and there remains a constant stream of refugees coming into Eastleigh, putting strain on the already limited resources. As it is also a condition people get because they are shirking their obligations of faith and piety, and healing oneself from buufis is a spiritual-moral project.

Much scholarly attention has been given to the question of how people experience the world through their bodies, and how they come to understand themselves in relationship to that world (c.f. Bordo 1990; Csordas 1990, 1994, 1996; Foucault 1986; Geurts 2002; Kirmayer 1989; Kleinman, A., Brodwin, P., Good, B.J., & DelVecchio Good, M 1992; Lester 2005; Livingston 2005; Throop 2005, 2008). Other have examined ways people understand the suffering body and person, and how they heal, in ways that are not limited to biological healing, (see Das, Kleinman, Ramphela & Reynolds 2000; Good 1994; Hinton 1996; Kleinman 1988; Kleinman, Das & Lock 1997). Still others have analyzed bodies in contexts of social and political violence (see Ahearn 2000; Bracken et al. 1995; Hinton 1996; Hollifield et al. 2002; Kidron 2004; Rousseau, et al. 2001; Rousseau and Drapeau 2003; Scarry 1985; Scheper-Hughes 1992; Suarez-Orosco 1990). Underlying much of this literature is a critique of the Cartesian mind/body dualism, whereby the body and the mind or spirit are kept distinct from one another. Indeed, these scholars have pointed out that by transforming the category of body as an agent and one that is inherently socially, historically and contextually meaningful, we can gain deeper insight into how people experience “being-in-the-world” (see Csordas 1994).

Kirmayer and Blake (2009), Csordas (2004, 2009), and other anthropologists insist that to unpack experiences of “being-in-the-world” one must pay attention not only to how individuals somatize their experiences in life (with pain, joy, suffering and so on),

but also how they narrate and describe their experiences. Language and semiotics not only represent or refer to people's lived experiences, but here drawing on Heidegger, we might say language "discloses" our being-in-the-world (Csordas 1994:11)<sup>148</sup>.

For example, in his work among Sierra Leonean refugees, Doug Henry (2006) discusses how the body and bodily illnesses became tools through which individuals define self and experience. For the individuals with whom he worked, experiences with suffering were discussed in terms of a local illness called *haypatensi*<sup>149</sup>. People were "attacked" by *haypatensi* particularly during an outbreak of intense violence, and it was most often associated with great fear, rapid heartbeat (echoing the rapid-fire of guns), and a "hot" heart (2006: 388-9). While the local category of *haypatensi* acknowledged the social and physical aspects of the illness, the Western biomedical category of hypertension with which these refugees were most often diagnosed did not account for the social aspects of the disease. Indeed, according to Henry, many of the individuals who were diagnosed with hypertension were blamed for their condition and the pharmacists and practitioners who diagnosed it (often without a blood pressure test) profited from the diagnoses. According to Henry then, the use of the term and diagnosis of *haypatensi* offered individuals ways "to assert more agency, in effect resisting the dominance and blame of the pharmaceutical or biomedical models" (2006: 390). Henry asserts that the people who suffered from *haypatensi* would only be cured with the end of the war. Importantly, Henry argues, although the discussions of the illness and the ways

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<sup>148</sup> Later in this chapter, I will also discuss how language may create a sense of "being-in-the-world" and how that is related to my discussion of *buufis* as a metaphor.

<sup>149</sup> Obviously, *haypatensi* is related to the western biomedical condition of hypertension. Many of the ways it was experienced by individuals included symptoms characteristic of hypertension, and therefore it was treated most commonly with hypertension medicine.

to go about healing were contested, the individual, subjective experiences of violence were nevertheless mediated through conversations about it, thereby enabling people to understand their experiences and bring order to their lives (Henry 2006).

All of these self-prescriptions suggest that long-term treatment of *haypatensi* lies at exactly the same location where people learn to cope with the long-term effects of violence—learning to treat one’s hypertension is coming to terms with one’s grief and losses suffered from war. Most importantly, these treatments address symptoms that Inderal does not—violence and the tremendous suffering and loss that it entails is not a short-term phenomenon; its effects are chronic and last for years after any single physical event. People living in violence live with chronic warfare, chronic economic insecurity, and prolonged states of terror. That an illness like *haypatensi* comes to represent and express this is not at all surprising. (Henry 2006:391)

Similarly, in the introduction to their book, Culture and Panic Disorders, Devon Hinton and Byron Good (2009) point out that although anxiety and suffering are experienced around the world, the various somatic events experienced by people are referred to using local metaphors of distress that carry local ontological significance. For the Cambodian refugees with whom Hinton worked, for instance, experiences of suffering were described as *khayl* (tinnitus), or literally “shooting from the ears” (2009: 3) or “wind attacks” (2010). As Hinton points out, the cultural syndrome of *khayl* connects trauma, social and somatic experiences in ways superior to the culturally remote construct such as PTSD (Hinton 2010; see also Nichter 2010) and provides a language for lived experiences and the people who suffer from them.

Just as health and wellness are connected to constructions of self and personhood, I agree with Farmer (2003; see also Fordham 2001; Livingston 2005; Zigon 2008) that they are almost invariably connected to the construction of *moral* persons, contributing to discussions of what constitutes ethical behavior and morality more broadly. In fact,

certain forms of illness actually create a (im)moralized subject in the diagnosed individual (see Farmer 2003; Fassin 2010; Foucault 1986; Kleinman 2006; Lester 2009). In his recent work among the Yap, for instance, C. Jason Throop (2008) illustrates how individuals consciously re-work their experiences with pain, coding it as something they have “suffered for,” thereby making the actual pain and the living through it, an ethical act contributing to the construction of the sufferer as moral person (272). Reframing suffering and pain in terms of morality transforms the pain (and ultimately the subjectivity of the suffering person) into a virtuous experience. Indeed, Obeyesekere (1981; 1990), in his discussions of the work of culture, points out that through the internalization of cultural forms, which mediate the “transformation of symptom into symbol” (1981: 35), the otherwise pathological may become validated and ethical or at least culturally meaningful (see also Throop 2008).

As I argue for Eastleigh women, an idiom of distress (here, *buufis*) is reorganized and reworked in terms of morality, suffering itself—and importantly the *working through* the suffering—can also be profoundly moral and moralizing. The specifics of this process may vary by context and by the particular features of the diagnostic category. In the case of *buufis*, suffering both indexes unethical behavior and provides a way to construct (and label people as) moralized subjects.

### **Buufis in Eastleigh**

In the previous chapter, I introduced the story of a woman named Zamzam who, as I noted, was one of the few Somali women I met in Eastleigh who showed what I perceived to be potential signs of psychological anxiety. She told me that she frequently

had disturbing memories of the time when her brother was killed and her own ear shot off, and the memory of this experience occasioned regular nightmares. She told me that she grew very upset every time she thought of the event, particularly when her brother's friends visited her, and that during those visits, or right after a dream, she felt like she was suffocating. She reported that she regularly had trouble sleeping (though since acquiring sleeping pills from the chemist, she said that she could sleep again) and was almost famous in her building and compound for her temper and outbursts<sup>150</sup>.

Zamzam told me that she never felt that the experience would happen again, she did not avoid thinking or talking about it,<sup>151</sup> she did not have trouble remembering the event<sup>152</sup>, she did not avoid social activities, she did not have a loss of interest in old joys, she did not feel emotionally numb, she did not feel like her future was cut short and she did not have difficulty concentrating<sup>153</sup>. In other words, Zamzam does not fit DSM diagnostic criteria for PTSD, which one might expect given her personal experiences with violence. Yet she was clearly in a great deal of distress as a result of what she had endured.

When I asked her more broad questions about how she grieved and how she was healing after an event like that, Zamzam spent a great deal of time emphasizing the

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<sup>150</sup> Each of these symptoms are listed among those most commonly suffered by individuals suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, as well as other more generalized anxiety disorders.

<sup>151</sup> In fact, Zamzam told me repeatedly that she needed to talk about the experience and that she shared it all the time with her friends and husband. When the groups of women gathered over tea or simply to socialize, these kinds of stories would come up.

<sup>152</sup> I should qualify that statement, however. She told me she did not have trouble remembering the event or the things leading up to and immediately after it. This interview was conducted, however, through a translator. Furthermore, I am not a clinician and I am not trained to work with someone to flesh out particular events in an experience or identify holes in a story in the same way a counselor would be. I did not push her in the course of the interview as I am not trained as a counselor and I did not want to be responsible for a flashback or for retraumatizing her (or anyone) during the interview.

<sup>153</sup> Each of these symptoms/behaviors are listed on the DSM-IV Civilian PTSD checklist.

ethical work she was doing on herself. She was praying with her husband, she was taking care of her children and she was being reminded and believed that Allah has a plan for everyone; she knew she was not alone because, as she told me, all Somalis have struggled like her and surviving the struggle is a hallmark of good Somali personhood. Although she was not currently employed, she was not idle. Since having her baby and since her eldest son arrived, she, and everyone in the compound I talked to who knew her, believed that she had become “a lot more calm” and was much better. What I believe is important, here, however, is not that particular events Zamzam experienced were not traumatic or that she has not suffered psychologically because of them, but that they were being processed and coded in a way that is locally and personally meaningful. Furthermore, in discussing what she was doing now to heal, she recast her narrative of pain and fear into an idiom of personhood whereby good personhood revolved around various ways she trusted God, performed her faith, and took care of her children.

In many ways, for Somalis, Zamzam’s story represents one of teetering success, or at least a success in progress. While she is in all likelihood not completely better – she feels she needs to continue with her ethical self-work – hers is not a story of moral failure.

Zamzam told me that she had at one point suffered from *buufis*. For her, it was obvious because, as she told me, when she first arrived in Eastleigh, she felt she was the only one who was suffering and feeling restless. She placed a lot of hope in the resettlement process as the key to the end of her suffering. The suffering and the distress she continued to experience at the time of our interviews and conversations was no longer

expressed through the idiom of *buufis*, because she had started her own ethical and spiritual work toward healing and becoming a better Somali and Muslim person.

Drawing on the literature previously cited, which suggests that physical and mental health are closely connected to moral personhood, and as identifying and teaching each other about what is ethical or unethical behavior is itself an ethical act, I believe we can look at another aspect of the construction of morality. Indeed, again, in labeling someone as suffering from *buufis* even when that person does not actually have the disease<sup>154</sup>, we can observe a metaethical process whereby individuals are defining the good and bad in light of their current situation and in response to their ongoing experiences. It is important, however, that I make a clear distinction between *buufis* as a disruptive cultural idiom of distress and how this same idiom is used by Somalis in mundane, everyday ways to offer social and moral commentary on individuals and their behavior and desires. I believe that because those individuals who suffer from the physical and mental symptoms of *buufis* are believed to be shirking their religious and spiritual responsibilities<sup>155</sup>, the idiom can be used more casually to suggest that certain behaviors and actions are unethical<sup>156</sup>.

In the next section, I will show how some people have lived with, are surviving and in some cases are still suffering from *buufis*. In Sacdiyo's case, we can observe how she once suffered from *buufis* as an illness, but importantly, we can see how in her work

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<sup>154</sup> Although I heard rumor of sheikhs who specialized in treating *buufis*, I never met one. Usually, *buufis* was identified in people by others (and by themselves) based on their exhibiting a range of physical and emotional symptoms.

<sup>155</sup> This is most clearly evidenced by the fact that everyone I talked to about *buufis* contended that to be cured of the condition, one was encouraged, even required, to seek out spiritual help and to tend to one's spiritual and ethical obligations.

<sup>156</sup> One could make a similar comparison in how words like "crazy" or "insane" are applied colloquially to judge the behavior of people in the United States and in other English speaking countries. Calling someone crazy may not mean they could have some sort of clinical psychiatric or mental health condition.



on her own moral personhood, she is overcoming her illness. Although her healing is not complete, and far from it, she believes she no longer suffers from *buufis* because she is working on her iman. To put it in terms of Throop's analysis, then, she has transformed her "mere-suffering" into ethical behavior – she is "suffering for," in that although she recognizes she is still in pain and not yet satisfied, her pain is something she is working on through her religious and ethical actions.

### Sacdiyo

"I had *buufis*, but I was never [crazy]," Sacdiyo told me during our first interview. She was a friend of Osop; they went to the same healing sessions with Sheikh Ahmed and could trace their families to a common ancestor on Osop's mother's clan line. We met one day as Osop and I were walking from an interview in the Hong Kong Mall to Mama Fadumo's house, where we were going to drop off some gifts for Fadumo's daughter, Asha, who had recently had a baby. When Sacdiyo first approached us, Osop did not recognize her. She was wearing a *niquaab*<sup>157</sup>, or "ninja" as it was commonly called in Eastleigh; Osop had never known Sacdiyo to wear one.

Osop asked Sacdiyo why she had not been going to *Ilaaj* to work with Sheikh Ahmed lately<sup>158</sup>. Sacdiyo told us that instead of going there, she had been going to a madrassa every day to strengthen her iman through Qur'anic recitation and study; she agreed with Osop however, that she needed to return soon. Teasing Sacdiyo, Osop asked her if she had *buufis*. Sacdiyo answered seriously that she did not think she had *buufis*

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<sup>157</sup> Niquaab is the word for the kind of veil that covers a woman's face as well as her head, neck, and shoulders. In Eastleigh it is a piece of fabric, usually black, that is tied on at the back of the head.

<sup>158</sup> Osop's mother and sister went daily to see Sheikh Ahmed. Osop regularly went with them. They noticed when people stopped attending.

anymore because she was working so hard, but that she was struggling. She agreed to meet with me in her home to talk in more detail.

Later that week, we went to meet her in her apartment. Directly to the left of the entry door was a tiny kitchen area, though the small coal cooking stove was in the hall. A young woman brought out a cooking pot and placed it on the stove as we walked in. We were instructed by another young woman to enter one of the rooms in the hallway and sit down while we waited for Sacdiyo to be ready. The room, like most of the Somali rooms I had been in, doubled as a sitting room and sleeping room depending on the time of day. There were two mattresses in the room, one on the floor and one raised on a frame. Osop and I sat down on the mattress on the floor. There were at least a dozen copies of the Qur'an stacked on top of the television and heavy red curtains draped over the all of the walls including the only wall with the window. A thin plastic cover made to look like tile lined the floor. Other than being rather warm, the room was very clean and very comfortable. After waiting a few minutes, Sacdiyo came in the room wearing a worn cotton *baati* and headscarf. She was no longer wearing a *ninja*; its absence revealed several scars on her face. She walked toward us smiling broadly. She greeted us, "Salam Alaikum"; she took my right hand with her right hand and kissed the top of it. I returned the greeting and kissed the top of her hand. Many of the women I talked with over the course of my research would not shake my hand without putting a layer of fabric between our palms first, if they shook my hand at all. I was thrilled whenever women greeted me like Sacdiyo; it was a show of great respect and solidarity. She greeted Osop in the same way and we all sat down.

“It is not madness. I had *buufis*, but I was never crazy,” she insisted again as we sat down. She proceeded to describe her own story and her own desire to move abroad. At the time of this interview in 2006, Sacdiyo was 21 years old. In 2001, she lived with her family in a suburb of Mogadishu. Her husband had already moved to Kenya and set up a life in Eastleigh. One afternoon while she was sitting in her house drinking tea with her uncle, a few cousins, and some other family members, the air filled with sounds of gunfire. As she talked about the gunfire, she drummed rapidly on the edge of the bed frame where she sat. She described how she watched, as if in slow-motion, her uncle’s heart get shot right out of his body and splatter on the wall behind him. “He just fell over to the side. His heart was still beating<sup>159</sup> when it hit the wall behind him,” she told me. One by one, the rest of the people in the room fell. “It took me some time to realize that I had not been shot,” Sacdiyo told me, “but as soon as I did, I knew that it was time for me to leave Mogadishu.” She did not know why her family had been targeted. When I asked her, she shrugged, “There were too many people shooting then. They did not care who they shot. They just wanted money and guns and to scare people. They would shoot anyone.” As soon as she buried her family members, she left Mogadishu to join her husband in Eastleigh.

When she first joined her husband, they were happy, she told us. But within a year she and her husband were fighting a lot; he had started beating her on a regular basis. She cried when she talked about the abuse she received at the hands of her ex-husband.

“Nothing was good enough for him,” she told me. She told me that she thought his anger came from his frustration about not being able to work in Eastleigh. When they first

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<sup>159</sup> Of course the heart was not still beating. The important part of this story is, however, not whether or not the heart was still beating, but that this moment marks a moment of crisis for Sacdiyo and one that she would have to re-narrativize in the course of her healing.

started fighting, Sacdiyo described how she went to see a sheikh; she believed that he might be able to help her with her marriage. This sheikh, she explained, told her that she was possessed by a jinn who was interested in keeping her separated from her husband. The jinn was making Sacdiyo act and do exactly in ways that would aggravate her husband. Unfortunately, this knowledge did not stop her husband from beating her. Eventually Sacdiyo's husband divorced her. He kicked her out of the apartment in the middle of the night in Eastleigh. Because she did not have any family or close friends in Eastleigh, she was forced to find some distant relatives to stay with.

After the divorce, Sacdiyo described how her attitude in life changed dramatically. During the subsequent months, she lost a lot of weight and regularly suffered from migraines. She had also started picking at her face, which left dark scars on her cheeks. As a result of attempts to erase the scars with skin bleaching cream, she also had several chemical burns on her face. She explained that she had started wearing a *niquaab* in addition to her *jilbaab* in public now because she did not want her ex-husband or his family to recognize her on the street; she also wore it, however, to hide her complexion.

Sacdiyo also described how she had trouble sleeping and that whenever there was a loud bang outside, even if it did clearly not come from a gun, she would jump up and hide behind the curtains on the wall<sup>160</sup>. Because she did not have any close family or friends other than her husband's in Eastleigh, after being expelled from her husband's

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<sup>160</sup> One of the most common forms of decoration in Somali homes in Eastleigh were ceiling to floor curtains on every wall, including covering the windows. They were frequently thick, dark red, plush curtains often with ornate floral designs. During the day, most families would tuck extra mattresses and foam pads behind the curtains so as to transform the sleeping room into a sitting/eating/socializing room.

home, she found a distant cousin and solicited her family's help. In exchange for taking care of the children and household, Sacdiyo was given room and board in their home.

A few months after securing space in this home, she met a Somali man who was a naturalized American citizen in Eastleigh visiting his family. After only a few days of knowing her, he asked her to marry him. They married but only a few days later, he returned to Minneapolis with lofty promises of securing for her the necessary visas to join him; when I met her, she wanted desperately to join him. She had heard many stories about how when people went abroad they suddenly happy and healthy. She also explained to us that it was not good for a woman to be separated from her husband.

After several months of what she called "suffering," Sacdiyo finally went to a chemist<sup>161</sup> who gave her some sleeping pills, which she acknowledged were helping her feel more calm, enabling her to sleep at night. But, she quickly added, the only real comfort she ever got was when she was reading or listening to the Qur'an. At the time of this conversation, Sacdiyo had been married to that man for over a year, although she rarely heard from him and she blamed her more severe symptoms of buufis on this fact. All of the symptoms she had experienced since she divorced her first husband (weight loss, headaches, sleeplessness) had worsened, but this time she placed far more emphasis on discovering a way to get to the United States.

Finally, one day, after seeing Sacdiyo in so much distress, her friend physically forced her to go and see Sheikh Ahmed, which is where she met Osop. From Sheikh Ahmed<sup>162</sup>, Sacdiyo learned why she had become so sick and how to get healthy. She

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<sup>161</sup> In Kenya, pharmacists were called "chemists."

<sup>162</sup> Sheikh Ahmed is the same Sheikh Ahmed who I talked at length to and about in Chapter 4. He ran a spiritual and physical healing session for primarily Somali women who suffer from various mental and

explained that she had fallen in love with going abroad so much that she started to lose her faith and to stray from her path. By focusing on how to join her husband in Minnesota, she had been neglecting her duties of faith. By the time I met Sacdiyo, she was going to madrassa every morning, praying five times a day, and she listened to Qur'anic recitation or sermons on CD and DVD every evening. When I asked her how that helped her heal the *buufis*, she explained that those individuals who still suffered from *buufis* were most likely neglecting the work required to keep their iman filled; they had strayed from their path. Although she still believed that to be a good wife, she belonged in Minnesota with her husband, she clarified that it was not because of *buufis* anymore.

Significant in Sacdiyo's narrative, I believe, is the fact that she reframed her experiences of and responses to the violence, displacement and vulnerability in her life in terms of this moralized discourse of *buufis* in relationship to her (lack of) faith or pious practices. Not only did she suffer from the symptoms of *buufis* at one time—symptoms that shared with other general anxiety disorders—but far more importantly to Sacdiyo as she told her story was the fact that she is healing her *buufis* through her ethical hard work of piety and moral responsibility. She deliberately and self-consciously replaced her doubt and sense of vulnerability in this space of transition, from the first moment of moral crisis when her family was killed around her, through to her abusive ex-husband and absent current husband, with the work of becoming a good Muslim and more broadly a good moral person and as such, for Sacdiyo, she was finally on the mend.

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spiritual disorders. He worked closely and at length with Sacdiyo, Osop and many other women I knew in Eastleigh.

Zigon (2008) writes, “It is in the moment of moral breakdown, then, that morality, as both lived and embodied and discursively articulated, becomes a conscious question or dilemma and leads to a person or persons ethically working to overcome this question or dilemma” (18). *Buufis*, I believe, provides entrée into the ethical work that is being undertaken in the Somali community in Eastleigh. Through the signs and symptoms of *buufis* and discussions thereof, individuals can explore and work on what good Somali moral personhood looks like. Through moral critique, often evidenced by symptoms mapped out on the human mind and body, Somali women remind themselves of their responsibilities as Somali moral persons. Within this discourse, and the idiom of *buufis*, then, Somalis are defining the moral.

Like Sacdiyo, Anab is another woman whose *buufis*, which appeared to be triggered by a particularly traumatic ‘final straw,’ has taken over her life in an overwhelming way. Unfortunately, however, I met Anab at a different stage of her *buufis*. While Sacdiyo was battling with the disease through the proper channels and means, Anab was not.

### **Anab**

I met Anab in one of the Eastleigh malls. I was visiting those people I knew and was collecting preliminary interviews on that particular day. We were also in this particular mall because I was doing some shopping for Somali casual-wear. I was told that it would make people more comfortable sometimes if I brought a *baati*<sup>163</sup> that I could

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<sup>163</sup> A *baati* is the name of the casual, cotton dress that Somalis wear in the home. It is far less formal than a *buibui*, which can be worn over a *baati* in public, but over the course of my research, especially among those individuals who I established a closer relationship, many people preferred that I wear a *baati* when in their home.

change into when I went into people's homes rather than remaining in my buibui, which was much more formal<sup>164</sup>. This particular mall had the best selection of *baati* fabric; this particular stall belonged to one of Osop's aunts. It was one of my favorite stalls. It was always impeccable and had the most beautiful *diracs*<sup>165</sup> for sale, as well as other clothing and fabric. We entered, and I told Osop to get some sodas for the ladies who had invited me in. We chatted for a moment before I started looking at *baati* fabric.

While I was looking at the stack of fabric, I saw an old woman walk slowly by the stall, pause, and walk back. She had walked back and forth in front of the entrance several times before Osop's aunt noticed her. She commented – almost scoffed – to Osop that if I really wanted to talk to someone who was still suffering, I should talk to her. Osop relayed the information to me, and then invited the old woman in to sit down.

Anab had glassy eyes, which she had a hard time focusing on any one thing when she talked. She kept her hands tucked under the hem of her *hijab* for most of our conversation, and spoke very softly. The other women walked in and out around her, but gave her no real attention or sympathy past the introduction during which Anab was introduced to me as “this old woman. She watched her daughter get stabbed on the street here in Eastleigh.”

Anab began her story. She explained quietly to me that she had only recently gotten out of bed again. “It is like I just woke up. I did not go anywhere, I did not see any

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<sup>164</sup> The decision to ultimately do this was prompted by an awkward afternoon I spent with Amina and her family wearing one of her baatis because my buibui was too formal. Amina was no taller than 5'2 at most; her baati hung just below my knees. Although on this day I was wearing some rather ridiculous striped knee-high socks, my near bare legs were a source of great amusement, indecency (depending on who entered), and embarrassment the entire afternoon.

<sup>165</sup> A dirac is a formal woman's dress most often worn at weddings and other such functions. It is typically a sheer cloth, often adorned with various synthetic jewels and sequence. It is worn with an equally fancy slip, which is supposed to peak out of the bottom of the dirac.



people. My mind was not here – it is always drifting,” Anab told me. In 2004, she left Mogadishu after most of her family was killed, including one of her four daughters. “I had four daughters, but I am left now with only one. They were all killed. The only one left is one of those who stayed behind in Somalia.” She came to Eastleigh with two of her daughters and her grandson. “My daughter was a very good girl. She always helped. She worked, she supported me. She was good.” Anab explained.

Only a few months after she moved to Eastleigh, she received a death certificate in the mail. It certified that another of her daughters has been killed in Mogadishu. This daughter left behind her three children, the youngest of whom were ten and eight years old. At the time of the interview, they were staying with their father and his other children. Anab explained that she was still worried about those children because their father, and particularly his new wife, did not believe in treating step-children very well. She believed that the children would not be safe if that house was attacked because the new wife would not feel inclined to protect children who were not her own. “When that first daughter was killed, although I was grieving and suffering, I was still able to work,” she said. “And then one of my girls here grew very ill and died. She died of malaria. That was very hard. But when the third girl was stabbed, over here, just there in the market,” she pointed abstractly in the direction of the street, “I could not function. I was just lost.”

Anab’s daughter was stabbed in broad daylight on the streets of Eastleigh when she tried to come to the assistance of an old woman who was being mugged by a Kenyan man<sup>166</sup>. Anab emphasized how kind and good her daughter was to protect the elderly

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<sup>166</sup> During the interview, she referred to the Kenyan man as “*Adoon*,” the Somali word that is used to refer to non-Somali Africans. Literally, it means slave, and while historically it was used to refer to the Bantu Somalis who were brought (and enslaved) to work in agricultural areas in Southern Somalia, it is more broadly used to refer to people with different phenotypical features or to refer to generally to Africans. It

stranger, but she was stabbed in the neck when she intervened. Anab witnessed the event. She watched her daughter try to stop the man who was attacking the old woman, she saw him stab her daughter, and she witnessed her fall to the ground with thick black blood collecting in a pool around her head and neck. While she told me this, Anab was looking toward the ceiling of the small stall with tears streaming out of her eyes. I glanced at Osop. Usually when we got to a point in an interview when the person speaking had become uncomfortable, we would remind them that they could stop talking at any time. We told people regularly how sorry we were for their loss. But this woman had gotten to the point where she did not seem to want to stop talking, in spite of crying. She dismissed our offer to stop this line of conversation.

I asked her what happened next. She told me that the man was arrested and imprisoned, but that she had recently learned that he was being released early. “It is only now that I have woken up,” she told me, “I worry about that boy and I know that I have to get out of here. I go every day to IOM<sup>167</sup> to see if I can go to the abroad. I go to see if there is anyone who can help me. My daughter’s killer is being released and he will be angry with me because I am the one who sent him there.” “You think that man is going to try to find you?” I asked. “Oh, yes,” she replied, “He will want to punish me or my grandson for putting him in jail.”

Then I asked her how she was feeling now that she had “woken up.” She described how she was getting migraines daily because of the stress of thinking about her daughter’s killer, about knowing that she could not support the child, and about trying to

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does not carry the same overwhelmingly negative connotations as it did historically, but it is still derogatory.

<sup>167</sup> IOM, or the International Organization for Migration is a non-profit, non-governmental organization involved with the processing and screening of refugees hoping for third-country resettlement.

find a way to go abroad. She repeatedly told me about how she knew she needed to go abroad because there she and her grandson would be safe. She asked me if I knew anyone at the UN<sup>168</sup>, JVA<sup>169</sup> or IOM who could help her. I apologized and told her I did not and then asked her if she was seeing anyone for her headaches and stress. She told me that she had stopped reading the Qur'an and did not have anyone to read it to her. She was not going to any of the local sheikhs' homes to listen to Qur'anic recitation or to be healed spiritually or going to any of the many women's prayer sessions that happened around Eastleigh. She had gone to a chemist for some pain killers for her headaches but otherwise, she spent most of her time either in the market looking for food and money handouts or at one of the refugee processing centers. "I worry so much, the day just passes by," Anab said, "but if you can help me get abroad, I know I will be better. It will get better."

After Anab left the stall, Osop looked at me, exasperated. "That woman needs to go see Sheikh Ahmed, Anna. She has lost sight of everything. She is not even praying." I asked Osop if she thought that Anab had *buufis*. With a snort, Osop said she certainly did. Anab's case of *buufis* was bad. "Anna, I think she might be really traumatized with it. And she doesn't have any family here to help her, or to insist that she goes and sees someone like Sheikh Ahmed." The other women in the room agreed. Although the experience was terrible, and her grief understandable, suffering was not foreign to these women; all of the women in the room had witnessed and experienced many incidents of violence. They did not suffer in the same way, they believed and told me, because they

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<sup>168</sup> United Nations – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

<sup>169</sup> JVA, the Joint Voluntary Agency, which is the refugee pre-screening processing arm of the US Department of Homeland Security.

had not stopped attending to their moral duties; they were modest, they continued to pray and listen to the Qur'an and give donations to the needy and support their families. Importantly, also, if they had started to fixate too much on going abroad or started to neglect their ethical duties, they had family around them who would help guide them back to their paths.

Like Zamzam and Sacdiyo, Anab's experiences with grief and violence could now be coded by an idiom of *buufis*, and could be analyzed through a discourse of morality. She was desperate to leave the city and believed that the only way she and her grandson would survive or be healthy again would be to leave the country<sup>170</sup>. Like both Zamzam and Sacdiyo, one could argue that she was displaying symptoms of various anxiety disorders. It is important to understand her experience in ways additional to seeing it as a psycho-pathology. The key here is the ways the other women in the room believed she should be acting and how she should be seeking treatment. For Osop and the others in the room, as they discussed after her departure, Anab would not be suffering nearly as much if she found her path again, if she worked on rebuilding, or refilling, her *iman*.

When I returned to Kenya during the summer of 2008, Anab was still in Eastleigh, she still wanted to go abroad, but she had not completely disappeared. She had not regressed to sleeping all day. I heard through some friends that she was a little better

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<sup>170</sup> Of course leaving would be important if, indeed, the Kenyan man was plotting his revenge against Anab. When I asked both the group of women in the stall immediately after my conversation with Anab and other Kenyans and Somalis living in the area who were familiar with Anab's story, however, they assured me that they highly doubted the man would seek retribution. The individuals closest to Anab told me that the man had been high (otherwise, they claimed, he would never have attacked Anab's daughter during the day in public in a Somali neighborhood like that), and that he would never come back to harm her.

than she had been when I met her in 2007, but that she was still not healthy and only infrequently attending prayers.

There is a point, however, when the reflexive framework required for healing oneself from *buufis* or from any kind of distress more broadly is simply absent. To heal through the ethical work of restoring and refilling one's faith, a person needs to have the ability to recognize her condition and to act on it. There seemed to be a point for some women in Eastleigh when their distress and desperation to go abroad was so deep that they could only spiral downward. In this final section about *buufis*, I will introduce the story of a woman, Shukhri, who had reached such a place. I want to reiterate however, that these cases of emotional and mental suffering were not many in Eastleigh, at least among those women with whom I spoke. Nevertheless, I do not wish to give the impression that Somali women treated the war lightly, or that the value they place on enduring and surviving struggle and suffering superseded any personal distress related to the horror they endured through the civil war and subsequent displacement.

### **Shukhri**

Shukhri was a quiet, kind, 45 year-old Sufi woman when I met her at the *dhikr* in 2007. Her daughter, Iftiin, had taken me under her wing during the *dhikr*. She explained all the rituals and songs, as well as how I should comport my body and how I should respond to the different prayers and songs. She laughed at me when I ate the rice with my hands and remarked that she never thought she would meet a *Mzungu*<sup>171</sup> who could eat

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<sup>171</sup> "Mzungu" is the Swahili word used to refer to a white person or foreigner, but literally means person who wanders.

like a Somali. For several weeks, Iftiin accompanied me and Osop as we moved around Eastleigh.

One day, she announced to us that her mother, Shukhri had invited us into their home for lunch and to watch some videos. They had several wedding videos they had just received in the mail as well as a video of a new house one of their relatives built in Mogadishu and they wanted to spend the afternoon watching them. I was invited to join them. Osop and I were thrilled at the idea of staying indoors watching wedding videos, so we agreed. Watching wedding videos, as I showed in Chapter 3, was a popular way of passing time for Somalis in Eastleigh, and it often provided a context in which I could observe energetic debates about and comments on proper personal behavior and personhood.

We met Iftiin in a central location in the market, so she could walk us to her home. Eastleigh's side streets could become maze-like and we were going there on the day of the miraa<sup>172</sup>-delivery, which always made the neighborhood a bit more frenzied. After we met up with her, she led us deep into the poorer residential area of Eastleigh's Section 1, adjacent to the now closed Eastleigh airport and air base. The tall buildings characteristic of the malls and residential buildings closer to the center of Eastleigh made way for smaller, more temporary structures. While the buildings themselves were made of cement, the gates surrounding these homes were of clumsily propped corrugated tin<sup>173</sup>.

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<sup>172</sup> Miraa is the term used in Nairobi to refer to Qat, the organic stimulant (leaves and stems) chewed regularly by Somalis and others throughout Kenya.

<sup>173</sup> In the urban areas of Nairobi, you could gauge the wealth of people based on the size and strength of the gate surrounding the compound. Wealthy neighborhoods were characterized by homes surrounded by at least 10-foot concrete fences with barbed wire, electric fencing and/or broken glass lining the top. Wealthy compounds would also have guards, often dogs, and usually silent alarm systems. The thin wall of corrugated tin keeping people outside of the inner compound, as was in place at Shukhri and Iftiin's compound, were public signs that they were very poor.

We followed Iftiin into a small room that she shared with her mother and occasionally her brother, who was a driver for one of the local truck/transport companies. There was a single foam mattress on one side of the tiny room, propped onto an old bed frame, and one folding chair opposite the bed. In the corner of the room a very small TV/VCR sat on top of a makeshift stand. There were stacks of VHS videos surrounding the television and a worn copy of the Qur'an on top of it. We sat down on the bed and Iftiin told us to make ourselves comfortable as she dug through a bag to retrieve her small photo album.

We were looking through pictures of Iftiin and her family and friends when Shukhri came in with a big smile on her face and a black plastic bag with a few bottles of Orange Fanta and Sprite. We all greeted each other, and as was almost a ubiquitous event, Shukhri and Osop spent a few minutes figuring out how they were related to one another. Once they had established that Shukhri was distantly related to Osop's mother, and that she knew her (Osop's mother) to be a very good woman, everyone in the room was smiling. We chatted comfortably about Somali poetry, about weddings, about music and so on. Iftiin and Shukhri took turns pointing out on the wedding video the women who had gone abroad, who had returned, who had died, and who had gone astray. Everyone in the room giggled when one young woman in particular came on screen because her dance skills were "obviously" atrocious<sup>174</sup>. At the end of the day, Shukhri told us that we was most welcome in her home any time and she instructed Osop to send her greetings to her mother and family. We left happy and with a date to interview Shukhri in more depth the following week. I promised I would take her to eat Injera, which she said was among her favorite foods.

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<sup>174</sup> Interestingly, during this conversation about the video, the woman, whose dancing skills were labeled terrible, was also accused by both Shukhri and Iftiin of having buufis because she was dressed in a more western style dress rather than the traditional dirac.

After being forced to reschedule a few times because Iftiin had gotten malaria and needed to be cared for, we finally met Shukhri at Bazra's, my favorite Ethiopian restaurant in Eastleigh. It was a nice, quiet place to chat, and the owners and regulars there knew me so I knew they would not interfere, and I knew we would have a private space to converse. We met before the lunch rush and sat down at a small table tucked in the corner. Shukhri looked tired and much older than she was, and even older than she looked only a few weeks earlier. Osop noticed it too. We ordered injera and avocado smoothies and commenced with the interview.

Shukhri was born in Galgacyo but lived in Mogadishu until she fled to Eastleigh in 1998. She told us how when she was trying to leave, her eldest son, who was then 18, was murdered in front of her. She described how when that happened, she took her two other sons, her toddler daughter, and just ran. She could not even look back. That was when she knew she had to leave Mogadishu.

Before moving to Eastleigh, she had lived briefly in Saudi Arabia with her husband, who was working there. While they lived there, Iftiin was born. "Saudi was very good back then," she said. "There was a good market and there was Madina. While I was there I went on Hajj. That is the goal of every Muslim. But only ten months after my daughter was born, my husband left me and I returned to Somalia to live in my mother's house." Shortly thereafter, she fled to Kenya.

Since arriving in Eastleigh, Shukhri has struggled with the same financial and security troubles that characterize life in the neighborhood. But as she said, "Right now in Mogadishu there is a lot of fighting. If it stops then I would like to go back. Otherwise what is the point?! For the kids to get killed?! Here the police will arrest you and annoy



you [but] there [in Somalia] the bullet is the law. I am getting used to not hearing gunshots everyday, all the time, here. It was very dangerous there.” But she followed this statement by saying that she thought she needed to go abroad and she hoped she and Iftiin would be able to join their son in Norway soon. Going there, she emphasized, would finally mean security.

During this interview with her, Shukhri was a bit more subdued than she had been when we were in her home, and she cried when she told me about the death of her son in Mogadishu. She also refused to listen to any questions about how beautiful Mogadishu was before the war. “Yes, it may have been pretty at one time,” she relented, “but it is destroyed now. What the Somalis did not ruin themselves, the Ethiopians have ruined since.” Because I could see her increased discomfort with the conversation topic, I changed the subject and asked her if she had been to the *dhikr* since the last time I was there. She told us that since Iftiin had grown ill, it had been difficult to find time to go to the *dhikr* anymore, but she insisted that as soon as Iftiin’s health improved again, she would return to regularly attending those events. “I used to go to the Sufi women’s prayer gathering every Friday, though not as often since Iftiin has gotten sick. I still never miss the Abbay – the feast to honor Fadumo and Hawa, the great women. They sing a lot of praise songs and pour oil into your hair. It is good there. I feel calm there.”

As the conversation processed, however, Iftiin’s restlessness and discomfort appeared to increase.

I have a lot of concerns here in Kenya. This is not my country and I have no financial means in this alien country. And the police here. I have great fear of them. They harass us a lot. They want money and you just don’t have a lot. Iftiin has a student card<sup>175</sup>, so she is ok, but me, I am always

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<sup>175</sup> The Kenyan police regularly raided Eastleigh to, formally at least, identify and arrest individuals who did not possess the legal documentation to be living in Kenya. On the ground, Somalis perceived these

hiding. They won't arrest her because she has a card, but I am in trouble. They used to raid people's homes looking for people without the papers, but not any more. But still there are so many police here patrolling the area. They do what ever they want. The biggest problems in Eastleigh are caused by the police. It is [also] muddy here, and people complain a lot about that, but you can wash mud off. You can't wash off an arrest or being thrown in jail because you can't bribe the officer. Now this girl [Iftiin] is sick and I have to take care of her. But I fear walking in the streets too much.

Shukhri got up to wash her hands. While she was up, I asked Osop if she noticed how troubled Shukhri appeared to have become. She had. Shukhri had started trembling and had stopped eating. She also started crying and was increasingly agitated as she talked about Somalia and Eastleigh. Osop suggested that we stop the interview for the day so that Shukhri could regroup. "I think she is still very disturbed by what happened in Somalia," Osop told me, "and she fears life here in Eastleigh. She is also worried about Iftiin." I agreed. When she came back, we thanked her for her time and for talking to us and told her we would pray for her daughter's recovery. As Osop and I stood by the gate to the restaurant, we watched Shukhri hurry away toward her home; she stared at the ground while she walked and her shoulders were tense. Quietly, Osop said, "That was not good."

Shukhri never again returned our phone calls. We called both her and Iftiin several times in the subsequent weeks to inquire after their health and to simply touch base. Iftiin's phone was turned off and Shukhri's just rang and rang. We searched the Somali rumor networks for word of either of them, but still we heard nothing. Then

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raids as opportunities for Kenyan police to collect bribes from those who did not possess proper documentation. In some cases, such as Iftiin's, the identification cards students acquired from local schools could serve as "proof" of residence, but for the elderly in particular, these police raids were a rather large cause for fear and feelings of insecurity. When an officer approaches someone seeking identification, often, if they can neither produce appropriate documentation nor a bribe, the individual will be arrested and potentially deported.

several weeks later, while waiting for a group interview to begin, Osop's phone rang. It was Iftiin. She explained to Osop that she had been in the hospital for several weeks. She did not know what had been wrong with her, but she had nearly died. Her mother had been with Iftiin in the hospital for most of the time but, she told us, Shukhri had been spending most of her days sleeping since Iftiin was released from the hospital. Iftiin had called because she wanted to tell us that her mother would probably not be able to do any more interviews with me for a while. After this conversation, several more weeks passed; we did not hear from Iftiin again.

Reassuring us when we inquired after them at the *dhikr*, the women there told us that Shukhri had really suffered when Iftiin got sick. When Iftiin nearly died, only a couple days after our conversation in Bazra's, they explained how it sent Shukhri into a spiral. She stopped coming to the prayer sessions all together. They did not know where she was getting money or food because her son in Norway had never been terribly reliable at supporting her. They knew that her ex-husband, Iftiin's father, was in Eastleigh and was also very sick, but they did not know where Shukhri had gone.

In 2008 when I returned to Kenya and to the *dhikr*, the women told me that they had seen neither Iftiin nor Shukhri in the last year. They allowed for the possibility that they had been resettled, but believed that was highly unlikely given the absence of rumors or news about such a move and no stories of goodbye parties. They believed it was far more likely that she had either completely separated herself from everyone around her or died of despair. They explained that when a person stops interacting with other people, he or she loses not only the benefit of interpersonal contact, but also the

economic, social, and other kinds of support that come with it, including personal, spiritual support and encouragement to stay on the right path.

For Shukhri, the despair and grief she has experienced since the war began in Mogadishu was profound. When the violence and grief from her past was compounded due to the various hardships she endured while living in Eastleigh, in not receiving financial support from her children and not being able to work herself, and finally when her daughter Iftiin became very ill, she experienced distress in a very deep way. Before we lost touch with Iftiin entirely, she told us that her mother was desperately trying to get approval for resettlement. The withdrawal and distress she suffered following our interview grew and although I do not know if she still (or ever) suffers from *buufis*, she had somatized her grief in a way that was identifiable to others as rather intense *buufis*. The women from the *dhikr* believed that because she had stopped going to the prayer sessions and withdrawn socially, she was in serious trouble.

### **Going abroad as moral work**

While the cultural idiom of distress called *buufis*, and more specifically the *excessive* desire to go abroad, is seen as dangerous and a potential sign of moral pollution or at least moral inattention and suffering, the desire among refugees to resettle to a country where they can be proper citizens and safe from violence and insecurity is certainly logical and not necessarily a sign of pathology. Before I turn to a discussion of why the idiom of *buufis* can be (and is) applied to individuals as a means of critiquing their behavior and attitude, it is important to point out how going abroad can be a component of good personhood, and in turn how the term *buufis* is occasionally used to

refer to this desire. Shamso here also explains a difference between the desire to go abroad and *buufis* as a problem:

A lot of people have *buufis*<sup>176</sup>. But a lot of people don't. I want to go abroad, but it is not necessarily *buufis* for me. *Buufis* is mostly with the youngsters. They don't know anything but a violent country and they are desperately seeking a better life where they can have a future. Some are carrying guns and killing each other. Others are simply wanting to go abroad to help their families. People are different.

Migration for nomadic pastoralists is an obvious necessity, but as I discussed at length in Chapter 5, migration has figured into narratives of Somali personhood in many other ways. “The abroad” has figured prominently in Somali worldviews and narratives of self and community since long before the civil war and migration to exile in Kenya (and other places). Indeed, many of the women I talked to stated that they had their papers in order and were ready to move to join their husbands in different countries (primarily Saudi Arabia, South Africa, and Italy) before the war started in Somalia.

Migration was desirable in each of these cases because of the resources or opportunities for future-bettering that was believed to exist there. The contemporary desire to go abroad can, as Rousseau et al (1998) have described, at least in part be understood as a logical extension of this socially sanctioned ideal. However, in addition to statements about the appearance of *buufis* as a sudden and large social/psychological phenomenon there has been a shift in how emigration is viewed. This is expressed most obviously in discussions about how uncommon and even shocking permanent emigration to the US and other Western countries in the abroad would have been from Somalia in the past, in spite of this long history of international movement. Maryan highlights this revision:

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<sup>176</sup> Here, obviously, when Shamso says that a lot of people have *buufis*, she is blurring a definition of *buufis* to refer, rather than a mental/spiritual dis-ease, to the very strong desire to go abroad.

When there was peace in Somalia and someone went abroad, they would say ‘that person is dead to me, how can they leave their country?’ Now they want to go because there is nothing for them here.

This revision of migration’s place in Somali history and cultural narratives certainly coincides with other ways portions of Somali history and culture are being edited and reified in their attempts to make moral, or usable, their experiences with the war and displacement.

“The abroad,” as I have discussed in more detail in previous chapters, is simultaneously a place for potential infection/degradation and opportunity for locating the means for providing positively to Somali communities around the world. Although every woman I spoke with had multiple stories of those Somalis who had gone astray in *dibadka*, or “the Abroad,” they also all had family members<sup>177</sup> and friends now residing in there who remained diligent in supporting their families they left behind. Indeed, those individuals who continued to support their families in Kenya and Somalia once abroad were viewed as highly moral persons.

Cindy Horst (2006) suggested that going abroad could be a way of redeeming oneself after one had brought shame to the family. In one such story, Horst describes a young woman who was disowned by her family after getting pregnant out of wedlock. The only option according to this woman was to go to the abroad, find work, and send money back to her family still living in Dadaab<sup>178</sup> and other parts of Kenya and Somalia. Indeed, as Horst documents, this young woman’s moral personhood was ultimately redeemed through her emigration and subsequent financial contributions to her family.

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<sup>177</sup> Usually the women: daughters, sisters, maternal kin.

<sup>178</sup> Dadaab is the refugee camp in Kenya near the Somali border, which hosts upwards of 300,000 Somali refugees as of 2008.

Going abroad at its simplest, affords opportunities for education, work, health care, security and comfort. In her home one afternoon, 38-year-old Muhubo told me with a sly grin on her face, “I want to go to America and fix my teeth.”

It is also important when talking about the abroad to talk about the kinds of work the abroad does for positive Somali moral person-making. The abroad is also an important place of Somali political and cultural production. There is great pride in the Somali musicians, politicians, academics, and community leaders in various parts of the Somali Diaspora<sup>179</sup>. Likewise, in several interviews, people talked positively about a friend or relative’s near-obsessive desire to go abroad by focusing on the ways that person is “doing the right thing.” In a group interview, one young woman explained to me why sometimes having *buufis* could actually be a good thing.

People will leave their children – even newborn babies – behind with relatives or even a close friend for the sake of *buufis*. They are sometimes doing this for the opportunities the abroad offers – so they can take care of their family; maybe in Somalia or Kenya they could not get a job. It depends on whether you left the child in good hands [if you would be judged harshly for leaving your child to go abroad] or if you have plans to take care of them.

The women in the room, after listening to the young woman explain this, insisted that it was absolutely wonderful if the person going abroad (or hoping to) was doing so to give the family and/or child a better life. *Buufis*, here understood and used referring simply to the desire to go abroad, is understood as a part of a strategy or management technique designed to cope with the uncertainty of life in Eastleigh or in Kenya and to provide support and a better life for the family left behind.

The abroad is also included in the set of ways in which people discuss groupness. When various diasporic communities and individuals therein are referenced during

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<sup>179</sup> I will go into more detail about the poetics and creativity of morality in the next chapter.

conversations in Eastleigh, rather than focusing on any pathological aspect of leaving, people generally preferred to highlight the positive qualities of the person (i.e. she is a hard worker and sends money regularly) and often also the unity of Somalis as a whole. Here, this is revealed in the statement Ruqiya articulated,

For example there is this boy who is paralyzed. A friend abroad decided that he would help this boy out by adding him to the case so that he could get proper medical assistance and maybe go to school – they have schools there for boys like him. The friend was going to help him out as “his son.” The boy was processed the whole way, but on the day of the final interview, they told him they needed a DNA sample from him. He did not know any better. And they rejected his case because he is not his man’s son. Now there is no hope for him.

Cindy Horst explains the presence of *buufis* in Dadaab in three ways: 1) the poor quality of life in the camp; 2) the need for (and therefore a lack of) peace and security; and 3) stories and images of a better life elsewhere (2006: 169-172). In Eastleigh, I believe these reasons remain important, as well as, of course, previous experiences with trauma. There is a difference in Eastleigh however in how Eastleigh is explained, and I believe this has something to do with the active reconstruction and redefinition of Somali morality in that particular place. We have seen that *buufis* provides a creative structure for morality to be defined and reinforced. It also allows experiences with violence and displacement to be coded in a way that makes sense. *Buufis* crystallizes all the tensions that Eastleigh’s physicality embodies and that with which Somali persons must contend. It is unique in Eastleigh because although Somalis are technically legally not allowed to be there, they are still building a future for themselves there and as such, life is somewhat less uncertain than in other contexts, such as in Dadaab.

The desire to go abroad is generally considered to be perfectly acceptable; it is even seen as logical. An *obsession* with going abroad, however, is not, particularly when



it leads to a shirking of one's requirements of piety and personhood. Here Amina's story highlights not only why one would desire to go abroad, but also how healing and recovery is related to faith.

Yes, [*buufis*] is a problem for Somalis. Some just want to work, which is why they want to go abroad. I thought I was the only one who had *buufis* before I came to Eastleigh. I was very sad when my visa and ticket were rejected twice. I was so depressed. I had the Qur'an read to me and I felt better. Then I realized that there are many like me. Here in Africa, there aren't many jobs, a weak economy, not enough food. You want to go abroad and study, to work to support your parents and to have something of your own.

Most often during the course of my research, however, when not referring to a specific medical case in which someone was physically and mentally suffering from the distress that *buufis* causes, *buufis* was used as an idiom to critique the behavior and comportment of particular individuals. Sometimes individuals were gossiped about using the language of *buufis* (i.e. Did you see so-and-so at the wedding last night? Did you see what she was wearing and how she was dancing? Ah, this *buufis* is bad.) and sometimes, people would directly accuse someone of having *buufis* as a way of telling them they did not approve of some aspect of their behavior. In the next section, I will explain how *buufis* is used by Somalis in Eastleigh as a way of expressing moral critique on the actions, desires, and behaviors of individuals and why a cultural idiom of distress is able to do this.

### **Buufis as moral critique**

Mama Fadumo introduced *buufis* to me for the first time in 2005 during a casual conversation in which she was giving me updates about her children. We were sitting on small wooden stools in one of her market stalls sipping heavily sweetened camel-milk

tea. She was, among other things, complaining that her son was failing out of secondary school. Ahmed, her son, sat nearby looking at his hands, occasionally eyeing me and seemingly gauging how I was reacting to his mother's comments. Mama Fadumo elaborated that she worried about Ahmed and Asha, her daughter, because they did not want to go to school (both Qur'anic and secular); they did not see the value in formal education. Then with a sardonic snort and a slight wave of her hand, Mama Fadumo dismissed the conversation, "Ah, he has *buufis* like the rest of them." Ahmed looked up and grinned at me, his gold front tooth shining from the light in the small stall. Catching him grinning, Mama Fadumo snapped at him to go and pray. Obediently, he stood up, said goodbye, and left. In fact, Ahmed does not exhibit any of the physical or mental symptoms commonly associated with *buufis*, but it was here that I first started to recognize the important distinction made between *buufis* as a culturally recognized cluster of physical and mental phenomena and *buufis* as an idiom employed for social commentary as well as how the insecurity of a life in transition, post-conflict, can be somatized by individuals. Furthermore, through the language of *buufis*, it seemed to me that Somalis moralize their behavior, their bodies, and their desires in particular ways; specifically, as compared to an idealized model of Somali Muslim personhood. Mama Fadumo was using *buufis* here to criticize what she believed was Ahmed's lack of attention to his faith and moral personhood and ignoring his responsibility to go to school. She and others are able to do this because, as they see it and explained to me, *buufis* only affects individuals who have neglected their duties of faith (a person who attends to his or her ethical and religious obligations will not be afflicted by *buufis*).

As the literature discussed at the beginning of this chapter suggests, societies around the world have different ways of expressing and somatizing stress and distress (Good & Hinton 2009, 1985; Henry 2006; Hinton 2010). These cultural idioms of distress (Nichter 1981; 2010), as they are often called, are meaningful ways of understanding how people respond to stressful situations differently around the world. Drawing on the literature that reminds us that illness and health are often the loci for projections of moral commentary and discourse, then, we may assume that idioms of distress in certain contexts may also index certain moral states and subjectivities that are particular to those contexts.

The Somalis I talked to in Eastleigh repeatedly told me that the only individuals who suffer from the *buufis* condition are those individuals who have stopped attending to their moral and religious obligations and duties. When people put their salvation in a migration dream rather than in Allah, they are weakening their iman and making themselves vulnerable to illness. As *buufis* is a mental health problem, it is also a faith problem and because faith is achieved through ethical and virtuous action, *buufis* is also about moral personhood. Here Sheikh Ahmed elaborates,

When somebody is desperate for something, they fall in love with it, and these *buufis* you that you hear of, literally refers to falling in love with. This love, whether love for an individual or love to go to abroad, or love the bed he sleeps in, that incorporates excessive need for any of those. And that [hurts the] soul. When you have a light iman, the person has nothing in them and he has nothing to defend him or her from the things that we experience, for example *buufis*. He has nothing to defend himself from that.

Thus, if someone has *buufis*, if one is so preoccupied with going abroad she has started doubting Allah's wisdom and plan (and therefore were no longer submitting to him), placing instead her hope for peace and her future entirely in being able to go abroad, her

moral personhood becomes questionable. *Buufis* can and is therefore employed in daily, mundane contexts by individuals to criticize certain kinds of unethical behaviors.

I was walking around the market in Eastleigh one day when Osop and I were called to a stall in the market where two Somali men in their early 20s were working. As usual, they started the conversation with the statement that they had seen me walking around talking to different people and they wanted to know why. Both were dressed in slacks and button down shirts; they both wore watches on their wrists and checked their (smart)phones every few minutes to make sure they had not missed any important text messages or calls (though I was also pretty sure that this was a useful thing to do to impress and flirt with young women – Osop whipped her phone out pretty soon after arriving as well). After a few minutes of introduction and careful explanation about why I would like to interview men as well as women, one of the young men, Abdi, agreed to be interviewed.

The conversation eventually meandered on to *buufis* and I asked him to explain what he meant when he said that some people had *buufis*. He told me that one could not necessarily identify *buufis* in people if they were walking down the street, though if they wore too much “bling” (he touched his neck and wrists as he said this) or too much gel in their hair (note here that he is specifically referencing visually identifying *buufis* in men in terms of dress. He did not specify how women could “dress” *buufis*), they probably suffered from *buufis*. I asked him if he had *buufis*, he said hi did not. He only wanted to work so that he could make money to send to his family still living in Somalia and so he could make enough money to support his girlfriend, whom he wanted to marry as soon as possible. He continued to describe how those who suffered “too much” from *buufis*

talked about the abroad constantly and exclusively; they often could not keep a job because they were out all night in cafes and clubs talking about the abroad and their desire to go there and because they were up all night, they slept during the day. He alluded briefly to the fact that these youths with *buufis* were also likely to chew *qat*. They did not go to the mosque, he continued, they did not pray, they did not have a strong *iman*. *Buufis* was clearly something Abdi wanted to separate himself from – he emphasized that he had a good job, was working hard, and went to the mosque. He was a good person.

Other people described similar ways of behaving and dressing as evidence of *buufis*. When I was collecting household surveys, my research assistants regularly pulled me aside when we met someone who they believed had *buufis*. In one case, Osop and her sister who had come with us that day were particularly certain that a young woman had *buufis*. For them, it was displayed in her dress. When we met 21-year old Fowsia in her home, she was wearing trendy strategically faded tight jeans and a small top; she reassured us, however, that she wore a buibui when she left her home. After we left Fowsia, I asked Osop and her sister why they were so convinced she had *buufis*; she did not have any obvious symptoms of any kind of heightened anxiety, she looked healthy and she did not talk about any desire to go abroad at all.

With slight smiles, they asked me if I had seen her clothing. They then elaborated that clearly this woman thought that dressing in a Western way was better than dressing in a more modest, Somali way. They both disapproved of her clothing and found her covering up only in public insufficient and her sartorial choice indexed for them at least, a privileging of Western culture and values. Like the toenail polish, this way of adorning

oneself they believed was un-Islamic and immodest and therefore improper. In labeling this woman as having *buufis*, Osop and her sister were simultaneously marking<sup>180</sup> Fowsia as behaving in a morally questionable way and were performing their own morality.

But a person's dress was also not always a prescriptive indicator. We also talked briefly with 23 year-old Hawo, who although she wore buibui and ninja (the colloquial term for the face veil), she believed she would be happier abroad. What determined her case as *buufis* for both Osop and her sister was her attitude rather than her dress. "She is a bit of a show off; the kind of woman who is lively, street smart, tough, picks fights, and goes out a lot. She has intense *buufis* - she believes she will be much happier in the abroad."

In another interview with a woman, 60 year-old Mana, when we entered the room to interview her, we found her chewing miraa. For Osop, this act, in combination with the fact that she was not properly veiled, instantly meant that she *buufis*. Again, as with Hawo and Fowsia, Mana showed no signs of any kind of distress, dis-ease, or a preoccupation with resettlement. It was, rather, another moral critique of Mana's behavior because chewing miraa is an act that was, particularly for women, considered immodest and improper<sup>181</sup>. And while her chewing had little or nothing to do with any

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<sup>180</sup> I want to be clear here, however, that neither Osop nor her sister were being malicious in claiming that Fowsia had *buufis*. They were simply offering to me a moral critique of the way she dressed.

<sup>181</sup> Chewing miraa or qat is very common among Somali men. In the past, men were known to spend long hours discussing and debating politics while chewing and drinking tea. Chewing by women is far less common and when I asked about it, people usually said it was a disgraceful thing for a woman to do. I met a couple women who openly admitted their love of chewing, but these were few and far between. In 2006 when the Union of Islamic Courts took temporary control over Mogadishu, the leaders of the court made a public statement banning the chewing of qat deeming the act un-Islamic. In general, the people who chewed miraa regularly were heavily criticized for it usually meant they would remain awake all night (it is a stimulant) and consequently not work or be able to support their families.

desire or lack thereof to be resettled to a third country, Osop and others who I asked about it labeled it *buufis*.

## Discussion

There is this proverb “A person has to look forward to do something with his future.” The thing is, we moved away from our country and came here for peace and work. The living is up to us. We have to do the struggling ourselves. No one else can do it for us. That is why women are moving forward without much suffering or worrying about the past. We have to struggle to survive.

For Somalis living in Eastleigh, the experience of uncertainty, vulnerability and frustration while waiting, and of working through and healing after violent events and pain is almost ubiquitous. The women I worked with and among in Eastleigh had all experienced various traumatic encounters and events; they had been forced to watch their children get raped, and they have themselves been raped. They have watched other people get shot, they have personally been shot, and many of them have also been forced to, at some point, shoot or harm someone else. Within this massive, extended moment of moral breakdown that has and is occurring in various places and on different levels simultaneously, Somali women living in Eastleigh are attempting to look forward.

In this context, the struggle itself has become moralized and the symptoms of a person’s ethical work (or lack thereof) become, once again, embodied. While this is not the only evidence of moral work and ethical struggle, the presence of particular symptoms of grief, here most obvious in discussions about and manifestations of the cultural idiom of distress, *buufis*, have been incorporated into the Somali metaethical project in Eastleigh. The people who suffer from *buufis* and who nevertheless ignore their

iman and their other moral obligations are judged for it. This is particularly obvious in conversations with people who, although they admit they have had *buufis* at one time or another, emphasize how much ethical and faith work they are doing to heal from the illness<sup>182</sup>. It is also evident in the ways people joke about and tease others for having *buufis* when they are behaving in a way that is on the border of proper ethical behavior.

But as is with Shukhri, and what could happen with Anab if she does not find her way to her faith path again, there is a point at which *buufis* can and does become something more than a harmless but excessive desire to go abroad; it could become physically, emotionally and mentally destructive. According to most of the people I talked with, when this happens, when it became a question not of laziness or general desire to leave Eastleigh but one of madness and intense somatization, it was most likely because the person did not have the social, economic, and spiritual resources to help her out.

More broadly, however, understanding *buufis*, suffering, and healing as aspects of the metaethical project Somalis are undertaking in Diaspora in Eastleigh is revealing not only of the local construction of moralities, but also points to the myriad ways, both individual, embodied, and socially identified and maintained, that Somalis are healing and building after moral, social and physical crisis. It also points out how morality is not only of concern, but central to how people creatively rebuild after crisis, war, and displacement.

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<sup>182</sup> There are interesting parallels to how people talk about and moralize sexually transmitted disorders in contemporary American society. Ryan White, one of the poster-children for the campaign to end discrimination against people who are living with AIDS and HIV during the 1980s, was able to be a poster-child because of the way he contracted the virus. He did so without engaging in any behavior that is popularly associated with deviant if not wholly immoral behavior (i.e. sex and/or drug use)



In the next chapter, I will focus on the more poetic aspects of the creative ways individuals are rebuilding and reconstructing definitions of the moral following war.

## 7. The Poetics of Morality

### Introduction

In 2005, I walked into a Somali music stall in Eastleigh prepared with a list of Somali musicians I had found through a rather unsophisticated google search, and with the emotional and social backing of my friend and adoptive mother, Mama Fadumo. The music stall, owned by Abdullahi, her nephew, was wall-papered with posters of various American and Tanzanian hip hop artists and Jay-Z's music dominated small stall. Mama Fadumo scowled at her nephew and instructed him to turn the music down as we entered, which he did immediately. She told Abdullahi that I was interested in Somali music and asked him to help me, then handed him the list she had just taken from my hand. As his eyes moved down the page, a slow wide grin grew on his face. He glanced at his aunt, who was frowning at some of the posters, and agreed to help me find these albums. He added quickly, however, that he would only comply if I also agreed to listen to (and buy) some newer music as well. The music google had referred me to, I was to learn later, was seriously (perhaps dangerously) "old-timer" music. A bit embarrassed, I agreed. Abdullahi found several cassettes and CDs from my list and began copying them for me. With deliberation then, he turned to a different stereo, turned Jay-Z off and gently inserted a CD into the tray. It was mixed by one of his local MC friends, he told me proudly. The track combined the music from Somali-born Canadian, *Juba*, with U.S. rapper 50 Cent's song, "*In Da Club*." Juba's rhythms, melodies and lyrics (all in Somali)

were woven through a track in which 50 Cent rapped about “Shorty” and “his birthday.” Abdullahi stared at me intently, his head nodding slightly to the beat. Not long into the song, Mama Fadumo commented that she thought Juba was good but then she said something I did not catch, but which made the (newly arrived) audience chuckle. Abdullahi turned off the CD. I bought a copy.

Earlier that week, Mama Fadumo told me that in order to understand Somali culture, I would have to understand and learn more about Somali music and poetry. This came as no real surprise to me. Scholars, travelers, and others have talked at length about the importance of Somali poetry, and to a certain extent, music, to understanding Somali culture, politics, and religious and ritual expression and performance. This, of course, had compelled my internet research about Somali musicians and poets. What I think is interesting for the purposes of this dissertation, however, is the role music and poetry are playing in the ways and means by which individual Somalis are expressing their opinions about proper and improper social and individual behavior.

Within this Somali context of moral questioning and metaethical work, I believe that there are exciting, creative ways morality is being reconstructed and defined, and in the case of poetics and music, performed. Music and poetics also provide a venue for a slightly less formal or historically accepted social group to participate. Bringing together, once again, an Aristotelian understanding of the overlap and intersections among praxis, poiesis, and phronesis, I believe that we can observe fun, productive, creative moral world reimaginings occurring in Somali communities specifically around poetic and musical genres. Furthermore, as I argue throughout this dissertation, definitions of the moral that Somalis are constructing within Eastleigh necessarily and deliberately include

the entire Somali diaspora. In this chapter, then, I am looking at poetic and musical genres that are created within Eastleigh, within dibadka, and that gain meaning in their movement back and forth.

### **Historical background and theoretical contexts**

Music and poetry are well documented and socially sanctioned channels for social, political and religious expression and commentary around the world (c.f. Abu-Lughod 1986; Bowen 1991; Urla 2001). Scholars have also acknowledged how, through their music, individuals may carve new locations from which they are able to participate in public social and political discourse (Hirschkind 2005).

The rich poetic tradition in Somalia has been recognized and commended by scholars, missionaries, explorers and other travelers to and experts in the region for a long time (Andrzejewski 1986, 1993; Burton 1894; S. Johnson 1996a; 1998; Samatar 1982; 1986). People have often emphasized Somalia as a “nation of poets,” which is a source of great pride to Somali communities and individuals around the world. In addition to being a creative and artistic speech genre, Somali poetry has played a pivotal role in politics, conflict management and resolution and public debates throughout Somali history (Andrzejewski 1986; 1993; Johnson 1996a; S. Samatar 1982, 1986). “Somali oral verse is central to Somali life, involved as it is in the intimate workings of people’s lives” (S. Samatar 1986:27). According to Samatar (1986), “...in pastoral ethos, poetry is both the instrument to precipitate and sustain feuds and a principal means to bring feuds under control” (28). Poetry and poetic verse have been used to facilitate the forging of alliances and the reviving of old ones. It has offered a voice for praise and for criticism (Gardner

2004). In this way, poetic genres in Somali society have both mirrored societal norms about moral behavior and personhood, but also through their construction, consumption, and surrounding debates, they actually create and define morality.

Poetry was in many ways the dominant avenue for articulating political rhetoric and commentary and has, particularly since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, been a mobilizing force in the various struggles for national identity and national sovereignty. According to Johnson (1996), three of the most common and enduring themes in Somali poetry are anticolonialism (even after Somali independence), patriotism, and the idea of a Greater Somalia, which would include Somalia, Somaliland, Djibouti, and parts of Ethiopia and Kenya.

Among the most well-known Somali political poetry was created during the Somali resistance to the British occupation of northern Somalia. During the broad and fierce resistance against British rule, the Somali Dervish Movement leader, Sayyid Maxamed Cabdulle Xasan, was a prolific poet, and his poetry was widely recited around Somalia (S. Samatar 1982). Many credit Xasan with the mobilization of a homogenized nationalistic movement among Somalis as well as to the rise and importance of historical prose narratives. (Andrzejewski 1986; S. Samatar 1982, 1986) Likewise, during colonialism and the struggle for independence, frequent rallying statements were hidden within the metaphors and language of poetry. “The poets who practiced it [Somali classical verse] frequently commented on public affairs, whether of their immediate community or of the whole nation, and endeavored, sometimes very successfully, to influence the course of events by molding public opinion and stirring their listeners into action” (Andrzejewski 1986:36).

Somali poetry was also historically a primary means for the diplomatic resolution of disputes and debates. According to many scholars, poetry was an ideal means for managing complex political issues sensitively. For David Laitin (1977), the structure of Somali poetry as well as the context and style in which it is performed historically allowed for very complex social and political issues to be resolved in a way that uniquely allowed for the maintenance of social status and face that other means of negotiation would not allow.

Complex themes are more easily memorized when in alliterative verse, and leaders can be sure that their message is being transmitted accurately if it is enclosed in a memorizable medium. Further, the alliterative poem generally has a long introduction, *arar*. The *arar* speaks about anything but the issue at hand, which is couched in allegory, or allusive diction, *guudmar*. A poetic message can be deliberately misinterpreted by the receiver, without his appearing to be stupid. Therefore the person for whom the message was intended is never put in a position where he has to make a quick decision. He is able to go into further allegory, circling around the issue in other ways, to prevent direct confrontation. Because poetry meanders into an issue, it is well suited to extended bargaining without any loss of face, inasmuch as the actual point of disagreement is rarely signaled out (Laitin 1977:39).

According to John William Johnson (1996a), the rise of the poetic genre “*heello*” was significant for Somalis and pivotal in Somali history. As with most genres of poetry in Somalia, the *heello* is rooted in the classical pastoralist poetic tradition. Unlike the classical poetry, however, the *heello* typically challenged existing norms rather than underwriting them (Johnson 1996a). In the third period of the *heello*, beginning around Somalia’s struggle for independence from both Italy and Great Britain, there was a vast broadening of topics discussed poetically. Generally speaking, the scope of topics the *heello* now addressed became very broad, reflecting any public concern (i.e. football (soccer), politics, love, the problems associated with formalizing the Somali language,

and international political developments such as the death of Lumumba). In so doing, the *heello*, according to Johnson (1996a), surpassed the older poetic genres in both number and influence.

As with many other places around the world, new studies suggest that the clear distinction between “song” and “poem” did not really exist in Somalia until the influence of musical forms from south Asia and the West during the middle of the twentieth century (Johnson 1996b). When the *heello* genre began being accompanied by drums and music, and sung by musical groups during this third period however, political expression and criticism could be created in this musical-poetic genre. According to Andrzejewsky and Lewis (1964), while *hees* could mean any kind of song, more often it now referred to a song-poem which had political undertones, messages and opinions. “The modern *hees* can be regarded as the popular poetry of the modern urban community, with its strong political awareness” (Andrzejewski and Lewis 1964: 51).

Kaptejns and Ali (1999) have argued that strikingly, these new, socially and politically progressive songs had many features of traditional poetry, despite, as they argue, that they were being created and performed by a new intellectual, urban (rather than pastoralist) elite. Indeed, “...the popular song inherited from the prestigious genres of pastoral nomadic culture its length, its unity of theme, and alliteration, the dialect of Somali used, most of its imagery, as well as its ambition to give expression to socially significant themes” (107-8). Thus, “through its literary production, including the popular song, [the intellectual elite] not only contributed to shaping the Somali people’s views of the future but also its views of the past. Indeed these poets and playwrights shaped their audience’s views of the future in terms of their literary representations of the past,

developing a discourse of legitimization couched in concepts of cultural authenticity and national identity” (Kapteijns and Ali 1999:108).

Prior to *heello*, women did not have a formal public “voice” with which to articulate concerns; with access to *heello*, women could participate in the same socially approved public commentary as men (although to a somewhat lesser degree) (Johnson 1996; Kapteijns 1999). Traditionally, the highest poetic form for women was called “*buraanbur*.” The *buraanbur* consisted of the *hobeeyo* (lullaby), the *hoyal* (work song) and *sitaat* (religious song) (Kapteijns 1999).

Historically, poetic genres and performances were not exclusively delivered in monologue-like-fashion. Poetic duels, as previously referenced, were elaborate events in which issues were debated and resolved. Poetic duets were also common. In an interview with a very famous Somali female poet, Mama Dhofu, she told me how poetic duets between lovers and former lovers also revealed details about individual relationships, as well as suggestions about broader personal worth. With a twinkle in her eyes, Dhofu told me about the poetic duet performed by two former lovers and famous poet-singers, Ahmed Cali Cigaal and Maryam Mursal, in Mogadishu during the late 1980s. “There are many folds of meaning in every song,” Dhofu explained to me. In this particular song, under the veil of a patriotic narrative, Cigaal states “*Bado in eey madowdahay biyo tahay mamoogetahay*,” which translates “Are you ignorant of the fact that the sea is black and is filled with water?” In saying this, Cigaal, according to Dhofu, insults Mursal by implying that she is ignorant and ugly. He also implies in his specific use of words that she is a member of the outcast group, the *midgaan*<sup>183</sup>. Cigaal then continues his

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<sup>183</sup> In Somali oral tradition, there is a parable about siblings who needed to travel during a time of drought and famine. Their parents told them that they should go and search for food. If they found nothing alive that



denigration of his ex-wife (to the apparent delight of Dhofo), “*Bodhariba cashaqu in uu bartalale dhigay oo laso boqday ma’ogtahay,*” “Love took “Romeo” to a graveyard and people went to visit him there.”

Women have been using poetry and song since the civil war in various communities within the diaspora and within Somali cities and towns themselves as a form of social commentary and protest. During the conflict in Burao in 1992, for instance, roughly 300 women left Hargeisa and other settlements around the area, tied white cloths around their heads, (a sign of mourning, as white symbolizes the anger or sorrow in Somali culture), and marched between the two warring groups singing the *buraanbur*.

Women crossed clan lines to engage in struggles to end the violence and wage peace. Poetry and songs were among the very powerful and most effective ways women were able to achieve any form of success. Many of the poems and songs composed by women during this time consisted of messages including: Why is this section of the town not speaking to the other section? Why is my left arm not talking to my right? Why is my brother fighting my son? Why is my husband fighting with my brother (Warsame 2004)?

Between 1992 and 1996, women all over Somalia regularly united to take part in an *allabari*, or a traditional form of collective prayer meeting. Traditionally *allabari* are held at times when there is a collective sense of widespread need, such as in cases of severe drought. During the *allabari*, people would come together to share meals and pray

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they could kill and eat, they could eat a carcass that was already dead. But they would need to vomit the flesh up again right away. The siblings went on their journey and eventually after not eating for a long time, they found an animal carcass. As they were instructed, they ate some of the flesh of the dead animal. Midgaal, however, refused to vomit the meat up at the end of the day. His entire family-line is a dirty and despised group of people, now.

(Hassan 2004). In 1992, a group of between 300 and 600 people, mainly women, gathered near Berbera to cook, eat, and recite prayers. “Women who were able to recite poetry and sing came together to meet and reason with members of the militia and with elders, in order to persuade them to end the conflict and enter into talks about peace with their enemies. They succeeded in getting the elders to sit down together” (Hassan 145).

Similarly, in 1993, responding to the ongoing strife between clans in the Wajir district of northeastern Kenya, a group of concerned women from different clans met to discuss strategies for peace initiatives. They formed the Wajir Women for Peace group (WWP). The WWP engaged women from warring clans in communal sharing of meals. There was an active effort to involve women from all clans and social strata. In 1995, the WWP women joined together with men, district administrators, elders, youth, business people, religious leaders, government and NGO representatives to form a coalition called the Wajir Peace and Development Committee. Both the WWP and the WPDC have been actively and directly involved in inter-clan mediation to stop violent incidents among Somali communities all over Kenya (Ibrahim 2004). Emphasizing the power women have in such movements, in spite of occupying the socio-structural positions typically deemed as powerless (such as Muslim refugee woman), Ibrahim insists, “To fulfill their potential in peace-building, and development, Somali women have learned to counter the passive, victim role often ascribed to them by people in their own society and by western scholars and the media. They have come to recognize – almost intuitively – the importance of their place in a clan system in which patrilineal descent forms vertical divisions, while marriage ties create horizontal integration and have unifying potential” (Ibrahim 2003:173). Nevertheless, women’s poetic and musical genres, as well as the women who

have sung them, have claimed a lower (public) symbolic value than their corresponding male genres.

If, as I argue throughout this dissertation, that during moments of moral breakdown, we can observe more closely the processes of moral decision-making undertaken by individuals and groups alike, and that this decision making is not simply a matter of a maintenance of a moral homoestasis, but actually a creative construction of new understandings of morality, I believe that we need to look at specific ways people are using poetic genres to participate in this discussion of what Somali moral personhood and Somali morality should look like. In this chapter, I explore how individual poets, by claiming their own moral personhood, are creatively defining morality. I will also look at how people in Eastleigh have consumed and responded to the mass publication and performance of songs and poetry. As we look at this, we can see how new social actors are participating in this process.

I begin by introducing Mama Dhofo. Dhofo is probably Eastleigh's most famous female poet and before fleeing to Kenya won several very large and prestigious poetry competitions in Mogadishu.

### **Mama Dhofo**

Mama Dhofo, an *Abwaan*, or a master Somali poet, is broadly believed to be one of the most talented and most highly sought after poets in Eastleigh when I was working there. When I met her, I knew that I had attended a couple weddings where she performed, but I had never personally had the opportunity to actually meet her.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> In 2005, I went to two different weddings where she was performing. As was standard during the buraanbur section of the women's celebration, I was "called" up to the front of the room several times to

Mama Dhofa is a big, beautiful, and lively Somali woman. She lives and supports her family in a newer two-bedroom apartment in the heart of Garissa Market in Eastleigh. She welcomed us warmly, when Osop and I arrived at her home for our first interview. “No, Nobody taught me.” She told me after I asked if she had studied with someone to learn the art. She continued, “It is a culture and tradition that we have. My grandfather used to *gabay*. My father used to do *gabay* and my mother used to do *buraanbur*.” But more than just inheriting the interest in the poetry from her family or her culture, she told me that her talent was a gift from God. As she described, she learned that Allah had given her the skill while at a wedding when she was just nine years old. I believe that through the production and performance of her poetry, which she believes was a divine gift, Dhofa establishes her own moral personhood, and through the performance of specific lyrics in which she challenges and promotes certain ideals of personhood she effects new ideals and worlds.

I believe that Somali poetic genres are more than simply socially sanctioned locations for expressing political and/or social commentary. Poetry and song are of course still used for political commentary. I believe, however, embedded in this commentary is a language about morality as well. As women like Dhofa (as well as young people, who I talk about later in this chapter) establish themselves as Abwaans, or elite poets, they create new spaces in which women are newly involved in broader moral discussions. They can comment on personhood (masculine and feminine), in relationship to Somaliness more broadly, and in terms of what it means to be a good Muslim. In this

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dance and bring dollars and/or headscarves to honor the poet and the bride. The first time I did this, I was mortified as I was dancing alone in front of at least 200 Somali women. I gradually became accustomed to this requirement; I was, nevertheless, never comfortable. During the second wedding I attended at which Dhofa was performing, as I was dropping my dollars onto the pile in front of her, she paused her poem and told me my dancing had improved.

way, then, we can look at and understand poets and poetics in ways that are not completely functionalistic.

*Clans, not factions*

Clans and clan families remain meaningful to Somalis in spite of the violence associated with them during the last twenty years at least. Dhofa acknowledges this in her conversation as well as in her poetry itself.

Dhofa states, “The thing is my guts will not let me do that because I am a grown-up and a Somali and so I cannot emphasize on clannism and fail to mention my country. My guts will not allow me to. Until I praise my country. And not praise all Somalis. For example now, there is a gabay

*“Until I call the refugees who are in different continents  
Subdivided until I unite you all  
Until I lay your foundations and I calm you all down  
For me to mention qabil [clan], my heart will not let me  
Understand me in that context, our beautiful tall ones called”*

I cannot say it [clan], my guts will not allow me, until I praise my country.

Within the text and structure of this poem itself, Dhofa states that she cannot praise clan until she has praised the country. Indeed clan and more specifically anti-clannism is a common theme in her poetry. By placing clan within the poetic structure in which it sits behind Nation and Religion, Dhofa is creatively (poiesis) re-making clan.

I do that whenever there is any gathering. If they have a conference, I will tell them to stop fighting, Somalis reconcile, that is the theme of my buraanbur and I also do buraanbur at weddings.

Yes, So many of them, yes. Let’s reconcile. Even when I go to weddings, I start talking about reconciliation and our country before I start talking about clans. I do not talk about them until I talk about the country and I invite everybody to get together [political groups] and after that I mention the boy and the girl and their families and that is when I say these things. But “*sheeg sheega*” [emphasis on speak/saying these things]”

The song that was probably most frequently referenced by different women and sung so regularly during weddings and other events that when I first heard it, I thought it was the Somali National Anthem, was a song called *Hantiyey Macan*. When I first heard it at a wedding, I asked the women near me what it was. “This is the song of our country,” she told me as she clapped her hands and sang with the 150 other women in the room. According to several of the women I talked to, this song was composed and widely circulated after the collapse of the Somali state.

*Hanfi iyo kuleylo- Baraf maleh dhulkenuye inaga haleynnee somaliyey ho.....ho...*  
 There’s no heat and humid air, no ice. We have ruined our land. Somalis...ho..ho...

*Hantiyey macan waa midaan hooy laga orane...helayoow...*  
 Sweetness of your property is that which you are not stopped from.

Mama Dhofa also had several things to say about *Hantiyey Macan*.

*Hantiyey Macaan* was sung for the country. It means that it is mine, it belongs to us. *My country*. “[repeats first line again].” If you are in your country, is there something that you can be refused [what can you not access in your own country?]. But now I am in a country belonging to *Islameed*. [I am in a country that is not mine – I am in a country of belonging to strangers]. And everything is scarce. There “[song verse again]” this bag belongs to this girl. When I try grabbing it, she will say “it’s mine. Leave my bag alone. Don’t touch it.” But if it belongs to me, she will not say that. So what it means is, sweetness of your property is that which you will not stopped from.... They will tell you, leave this thing alone. But if it is your country, but then it’s also the flag is praised. Every *qoolo* [country] has a different flag, ours resembles the sky.

Yes, there is no heat, and there is no wind, there is no ice and it is not cold. There is none of that. Even now in our country it has a good climate. It is not hot and it is not cold. It is not windy and it has no ice. But it is somewhere in the middle, [so] that you can live in [it]. And so it is a praise for our country. And for you to know that they are referring to our country and not to the flag, they say that there is no heat and there is no wind, there is no ice and it is not cold. And so our country has a good

climate. And you can live in it without wearing a coat or clothes that protect you from the cold. And you can also wear clothes that will not bring you heat. You can just dress up normally. You can do xaragoo in town and there is no heat and there is no wind. Hanfi refers to excessive heat or when the sun is too hot and dhabeel refers to the wind that comes and carries sand with it. Baraf refers to the cold and so all of those things are non-existent in our country.

### *Poetry and gender*

Through her poetry, as well as in her career as a poet, Dhofo is also contributing to the sense that gender, as a moral and social category, should be revised as well. Below is a gabay poem she wrote at one point to prove to a man who had challenged her that she could, in fact, do it. In four lines she outlines the statements of this man in which he states that cannot do gabay as well as men, shamed him in the actual words of the poem. She did all this within the structure of the poem itself. When my research assistant heard it, he said, “It is brilliant. It is just brilliant, Anna.”

*Abshir Bacadle, in his book wrote the power of gabay  
And he said, Bujuneey and Baxaad and Cirlo [women's names]  
Women cannot compose it and they are afraid of it [they cannot do as well as men  
in gabay]  
And I will bring one to the table that will shame his*

Mama Dhofo followed up, after she said the poem

Abshir Bacadle said that women cannot do gabay. He is an *abwaan* who is Sacaad [subclan of Hawiye], he did a gabay saying that women cannot do gabay. And I also composed that gabay. And that is what it was all about.

### **K'naan**

As I highlighted in the introductory vignette, new genres of music and poetic expression are gaining significance in the Somali community in Eastleigh. These include

mixing some international hip hop tracks with more tradition-sounding Somali pieces and of course using existing global musical styles such as hip hop and reggae to talk about, comment on and critique ideals/qualities of *Soomaalinimo*. For some, these new styles should not be compared to some of the older, more traditional varieties.

In a focus group about music, some of the women started telling me about a new group of young musicians based in Eastleigh, called Waayaha Cusub.

OH! Wayaaha Cusub! Oh, they're hot right now! In their song, Dadkii... They show footage of the video capturing the journalist who was killed (beheaded). They cut it off just before the actual slaughter.

However, although they thought that it was good for the young people to be so active, the older women in the room complained that K'naan and Waayaha Cusub were missing some of the important aspects of Somali poetic value and performance. As we were watching the music video for one of Waayaha Cusub's new song, one of the old women in the group spoke

The music back then was creative, distinctive, different and then the musician was also important – the words they were saying were good. The music now stays loud and you can't appreciate the musician. It is all the same. Look at that one! He is twisting like a girl! They left their culture behind. They have no culture. They have no rhythm.

And in an earlier interview with Mama Dhofa (who was not present during this focus group), she said specifically of K'naan's and Waayaha Cusub:

No, that is just a normal Somali song. And they are good. He is an upcoming artist. From now on, there will be more of them God willing. For example this, it is just one of those things that anybody can say, even you. For example now, [dhibkii...] and so it is not one of those things that need an actual composure and involve a lot of composure. But in the future, it is possible that he will compose his own classic things. Whether gabay or hees. These young artists, they sing people's songs, the old ones, ever since the war broke out in our country, even the songs were looted.



In this section I will show how Somali-born, Canadian hip-hopper, K'naan participates in Somali social and political debates through his poetry and music. I argue that K'naan both implicitly and explicitly draw on the Somali poetic tradition in which politics and culture are debated and discussed through verse. Moreover, I believe that in doing this, he is revising an aspect of the Somali moral world and contributing to what it means to be a good Somali moral person.

Given that Somalis are spread throughout the world, and new media has enabled people to keep in close touch, it is important to look at how Eastleigh is incorporating a voice from the *dibadka*. Somalis around the world are engaged in community rebuilding efforts at the center of which are negotiations about what Somaliness should look and act like vis-à-vis their non-Somali surroundings (c.f. Farah 2000; Griffiths 2002; Guerin et al 2004; Horst 2003a; 2003b; McGown 1999; McMichael 2002). Discussions and debates about Somali social, political and cultural issues abound on the Internet, and there is a very complex system of exchange of music, homemade videos and photographs. In short, a very powerful Somali transnational mediascape (Appadurai 1996) has emerged and within it a vibrant and diverse public sphere.

As Tony Mitchell (2001) argues however, many recent studies of hip hop and rap in particular too often attempt “to explain rap inadequately in terms of pastiche, fragmentation, the loss of history, and the blurring of boundaries between “high art” and popular culture” (2001:10). Here I will show how K'naan participates in a transnational public debate about the ongoing violence in Somalia. Through this participation, he implicitly engages in an ongoing socio-political debate about Somaliness and Somali moral worlds by privileging certain images, memories, and practices as authentically

Somali. Further, I will show how he does this through a deliberate fusion of hip hop music and more formal and traditional Somali poetic verse. Rather than simply a blurring of the lines between high art and popular culture, I believe because K'naan actively recalls images and memories from Somalia, Somali poetic structures, and specific poems and poets throughout his music, and merges these with the powerful voice and image of hip hop, he fosters enormous legitimacy for the arguments he makes against the factionalism and violence in Somalia within a very large, transnational Somali community, or mediascape. In making these arguments, then, he is producing creatively a rationalized moral judgment and sharing them. As Somalis listen to his CD, they are consuming his moral message and he in turn also contributes to the reimagination of the Somali moral world.

K'naan is a Somali born Canadian resident. He is from the section of Mogadishu commonly dubbed "The River of Blood." When he was a small child, his father Abdi, an academic, was exiled by the Somali government and moved to Harlem, New York. When the Somali government collapsed, K'naan and his family fled first to New York and then to Canada, where they reside now.

K'naan calls himself the "Dustyfoot philosopher," and for the last several years has been advocating for an end to the violence around the world, specifically in Somalia, through his poetry and music. In 2001, he was asked to read a poem at the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and in 2005 he performed at the Live 8 benefit concert in Ontario, Canada. Since then, he has toured around the world with many different musicians and peace advocates, including artists Mos Def and Damien Marley. The music video for his debut

single, *Soobax*, was filmed in the Somali communities in Eastleigh, Nairobi and Mombasa in Kenya.

## **Structure and style of poems and presentation**

### *Poetic Structure*

As I stated in the last section, there are a few structural characteristics of Somali verse that have been highlighted as central to Somali poetry by Somali studies scholars. The first of these, and perhaps the most important and rigid requirements of Somali poetry is alliteration. Alliteration is one of the most striking aspects of Somali poetry, for not only does at least one word in each stanza of the poem begin with the same letter, but none of the words are supposed to reappear through the remainder of the poem (Ahmed 1996; Andrzejewski and Lewis 1964; Laitin 1977). If, for instance, a poet alliterates the letter “d,” even if there are 200 lines in the poem, none of the alliterated words should be repeated. In such a poem, there would then be over 200 words listed beginning with the same letter (ibid). As many poems were actually initially improvised, this structural requirement necessitated impressive linguistic skills by the poet.

Further, only identical consonant sounds or vowel sounds (all vowels alliterate with one another) could be considered alliterative (Andrzejewski and Lewis 1964), so the “d” sound could not be alliterated with the “dh” or the “k” with “q.” Further, there are rules about which words can be used in alliteration; “they must be words with readily assignable meanings, such as nouns, numerals, proper names, or verbs” (Andrzejewski and Lewis 1964: 43). Andrzejewski and Lewis highlight an example of this in the following passage cited in their 1964 book, Somali Poetry, an Introduction. In this poem

below, the alliteration is on the letter g; note that the alliteration is not necessarily on the first word in each phrase.

1. *Dhaachaan ka gabangaabsaday e waygu geliseen e*
2. *Gooddiga Ban Cawl buu fakhrigu geed ku leeyahay e*
3. *Gaajada huggeedii miyaa galabta i saaray?*

1. I lately sought this plight for myself and you put me into it,
2. On the edge of the 'Awl Plain, poverty has a tree (to sit under)
3. Have the garments of hunger been put on me this evening?

A second key characteristic of Somali poetry is the relationship between vowel length and syllables in each line. According to Johnson (1996b), syllables and moras (vowel lengths) interact in one of three ways depending on the genre in question: 1) there is an identical number of syllables and vowels (long or short) in each line; 2) either one long or two short vowels fills a diseme (or a double unit of time); or 3) there are a specified number of disemes and syllables where there will always be more disemes than long vowels such that two short vowels will necessarily fill some of the disemes. While there are studies of Somali poetic scansion and prosody that go into much more detail (see Johnson 1996b; Banti and Giannattasio 1996), for the purposes of this paper it is sufficient to understand that there is a correlation between the number of syllables and vowel length in each line. Further, according to Banti and Giannattasio (1996), "...Somali verse is mainly sung syllabically, i.e. regardless of the underlying metrical pattern only one musical sound corresponds to each syllable" (87-88).

### *Oratorical style and presentation*

Probably equally as important as the structure of the actual poem is the way the poet recites and performs it. Perhaps due to the fact that poems were learned through oral

recitation and often initially improvised, during the performance of particular verses, the poet necessarily has impeccably clear diction. While the meaning of particular poems, specifically those with highly political messages or criticisms, would often be veiled through allusion, allegory, metaphor and other linguistic mechanisms, the poet's diction would be quite clear.

During poetic recitation, it was also common for the performer to sing his own praises for his poetic and political prowess. This is particularly the case when the poem has a specific political goal or message, such as when two rival groups have decided to resolve their conflict through a poetic duel or debate (Laitin 1977: 38). Indeed, poets are allowed to (if not expected to) boast as much about themselves, their abilities, possessions and opinions as much as they want through the course of their poetry (Andrzejewski 1986). The verbal prowess of the poet not only proves the poet's talent, but his oratorical excellence actually strengthens the arguments and chances for success of the cause or issue being debated. As such, the Somali poet commanded enormous power and respect in Somali society (Laitin 1977; Laurence 1964, 1993). As Laitin writes, "Poets, because of their unique ability to remold the language, to neologize, to say things in a memorable and convincing way, have attained positions of considerable power in Somali society" (Laitin 1977:39).

In the next section, I will show how K'naan makes claims to a similar authority and political power as the traditional Somali poets through his songs.

### **Structural analysis of song *Soobax***

In the following section, I will show how K'naan, through the song *Soobax*, recalls some of the formal Somali poetic structures I discussed above. Then I will

analyze some of the images and ideals of Somali society that he emphasizes through his music, specifically this song, which legitimize his claims and criticisms. Below is the text of the song, as well as the translations of the Somali words:

*Verse 1:*

Basically, I got beef, I wanna talk to you directly,  
I can't ignore, I can't escape, and that's 'cause you affect me,  
you cripple me, you shackle me, you shatter my whole future in front of me.  
This energy is killing me, I gotta let it pour like blood, *Soobax*

*Refrain:*

Dadkii waa dhibtee nagala soobax  
(*you have exasperated the people so come out with it.*)  
Dhibkii waa batee nagala soobax  
(*The troubles have increased so come out with it.*)  
Dhigii waad qubtee nagala soobax  
(*you've spilled the blood so that it drains on the roads, so come out with it.*)  
Dhulkii waad gubtee nagala soobax  
(*You've burnt the root of the earth, so come out with it.*)  
Nagala soobax, Nagala soobax  
Dadkii waa dhibtee nagala soobax  
Dhibkii waa batee nagala soobax  
Dhigii waad qubtee nagala soobax

*Verse 2:*

So for real, who's to blame, we lose lives over Qabiil's (*tribe*) name.  
Disregard, for the soul, we just don't give a f\*\*\* no more.  
Left alone, all alone, settle your issues on your own.  
What to do, where to go, I got to be a refugee damn, soobax.

*Refrain*

*Verse 3:*

Muqdisho, use to be, a place where the world would come to see,  
Jaziira Sugunto Liida, Wardhiigley iyo Madiina,  
Hargeisa, Boosaaso, Baardheere iyo Berbera,  
My skin needs to feel the sand and the sun, I'm tired of the cold goddamn, *soobax*

*Refrain*

*Verse 4:*

I guess I could use the last bar to flow,  
I'm known as a lyrical rhyme domino,

I'm cynical, well, oh now you know,  
put a whole in an emcee like cheerio,  
they don't hear me though,  
I work for the struggle I don't work for dough,  
I mean what I say, I don't do it for show,  
Somalia needs all gunmen right out the door.

#### Refrain - Repeats

Earlier I showed the importance of alliteration to the power and weight of Somali poetry. As I stated above, a Somali poet will with great skill alliterate on the same consonant or vowel in each line. While as is shown, K'naan does not do this during the verses, he recalls this tradition in his refrain. In his refrain, sung in Somali, K'naan alliterates on the consonant "dh:"

*Dadkii waa **dh**ibtee nagala soobax  
**Dh**ibkii waa batee nagala soobax  
**Dh**igii waad qubtee nagala soobax  
**Dh**ulkii waad gubtee nagala soobax*

While the context in which K'naan recorded this album does not permit the same opportunities for improvisation, which are characteristic of the older Somali poets, by alliterating in the Somali language during this portion of the song he actively recalls this older tradition and thereby stakes claims to a powerful, *Somali* form of authority.

The second poetic structure characteristic of Somali poetry is the relationship between syllables and vowel length. In the Somali language, a long vowel sound (indicated by two vowels in a row) will occupy two units of time, or syllables. In the refrain of the song *Soobax*, not only does each line use the same syllabic structure and have the same number of syllables (14), but for each place where there are two units of time, there is a corresponding double vowel in the word (as well as emphasis in the performance).

*Dadkii waa dhibtee nagala soobax*  
1 2 2 1 2 1 1 2 1

*Dhibkii waa batee nagala soobax*  
1 2 2 1 2 1 1 2 1

*Dhigii waad qubtee nagala soobax*  
1 2 2 1 2 1 1 2 1

*Dhulkii waad gubtee nagala soobax*  
1 2 2 1 2 1 1 2 1

Beyond the structural components reminiscent of Somali poetry that K'naan employs that symbolically and socially validate his criticisms of the ongoing factionalism in Somalia, he creatively and strategically references images and ideals about Somalia, Somali life, as well as specific poets and poems throughout his album. In the next section, I explore some of these techniques and analyze how through them, K'naan poetically further legitimizes his right to exercise political commentary.

### **Imaginings, Ideals, and Icons**

Earlier, I stated that Somali poets were often expected to boast about their skills as poets as well as their talent in discussing politics when they recited poetry. While K'naan's choice to boast about his skills as a poet/emcee in the final verse of *Soobax* could also be to differentiate himself from other people who are involved in the industry only for the money or image as a gangster, by praising his own skills as a poet (“*lyrical rhyme domino*”) and expressing himself as a potential target for violence (“*put a hole in an emcee like cheerio*”) due to his potent political activism, he implicitly and effectively attaches himself to a long-established Somali tradition of poetic political articulation and debate. Below is the entire final verse of the song:



*I guess I could use the last bar to flow,  
I'm known as a lyrical rhyme domino,  
I'm cynical, well, oh now you know,  
put a hole in an emcee like cheerio,  
they don't hear me though,  
I work for the struggle I don't work for dough,  
I mean what I say, I don't do it for show,  
Somalia needs all gunmen right out the door.*

Throughout the entire album, K'naan elicits images and icons of Somalia and Somali culture, which I argue buttresses his criticism of the factionalism. Often he recalls idealized images, places, practices, and beliefs of Somalia and Somali social and cultural life. In the third verse of the song *Soobax*, for instance, K'naan lists the names of several Somali cities which he claims used to be deserving of pride and attention:

*“Mogadisho used to be a place that the world would come to see.”* The current impossibility of the idea of that Mogadishu is a place people around the world want to visit elicits strong feelings of loss and evokes a powerful, if imagined, remembering process. When K'naan concludes this verse by stating his skin needs to feel the sand and sun, rather than the cold, he invokes an iconic, visceral sense of what being Somali used to mean and what he and all Somalis have lost: to be Somali one is near the desert and the sun. Here, his poetic act of remembering, however idealized, becomes a socio-political project as it is offered in contrast to all the awful things characteristic of life in Somalia currently. This sensorial recollection process is invoked throughout the album. For instance in his song “My Old Home,” K'naan opens with the phrase: *“My old home smelled of good birth, boiled red beans, kernel oil, and hand me down poetry.”* Listeners are encouraged to imagine a memory of each of those smells and attach it to something fundamentally Somali.

Finally, in another of his songs titled “Until the Lion Learns to Speak,” K’naan explicitly honors the Somali poetic tradition and the memory of Somali poet, Careys Ciise Kaarshe. In this song, he recalls the saying, “until the lion learns to speak, tales of the hunt will be weak; or tales of the hunt will be limited to the stories of the hunter rather than the lion.” According to the blogosphere, this is among the most powerful and well-received songs on K’naan’s album. Once again, K’naan references the Somali poetic tradition to claim authority for his political goals and messages. Through his music, K’naan recalls an idealized Somalia and Somaliness that is simultaneously imagined and real, and offers it as an alternative to the destruction that factionalism continues to riddle Somalia and Somali people around the world.

## **Discussion**

Recent studies of disenfranchised or displaced communities around the world have pointed toward the creation and performance of music as an important cultural venue for the production of “groupness” and social identity (see Goodman 2005; Urla 1996). The Somali community is no different. In her work among Somali refugees in the Dadaab Refugee camp in Kenya, Cindy Horst (2003a, 2003b) emphasized the importance of the importation of cassette tapes of Somali musicians located and performing around the world to the Somalis in the camps. She argues that by looking at and listening to songs and performers, the Somalis in Dadaab negotiate ideals about authentic Somaliness and Somali culture. Somali music and videos are essential commodities traded through the vast Somali social networks.

When I returned to Nairobi in 2008, I asked everyone I met what they thought of K’naan and his music. Many of the people I met had seen, some even participated in, the

filming of the video for *Soobax*. While a few were critical of the fact that K'naan performs primarily in English, and some were skeptical of his authenticity due to the fact that he never had to endure the refugee resettlement process, life in a refugee camp, or the hard life in Kenya, most of the people I talked with actually viewed his motives, poetry, and agenda as commendable. They identify and agree with his criticisms of the ongoing struggle and they appreciate his intolerance of ongoing violence. Further, they applaud the fact that he filmed the video in Kenya for it shows them that he understands the plight of Somali refugees despite never having endured such a life himself. Nearly everyone I meet on my daily stays in Eastleigh knows his music and many know at least the refrain to *Soobax*.

In studies about the impact of new media on the public sphere, many scholars have suggested that these new media, such as the Internet, cassette tapes, and other mass forms of communication have broadened the scope and participation by individuals in transnational political and social debates. For some, new media outlets, such as CDs or cassettes, have to a certain extent democratized the public sphere, allowing individuals who do not otherwise possess the means or education to contribute to larger discussions about community-ness (see Eickelman and Anderson 1999; Hirschkind 2005). Others maintain that while the illusion of a more democratic public sphere is created as people access it in more grassroots ways, older systems of authority retain their power and control over the public sphere. In concert with more recent studies of new media in the public sphere (see Eisenlohr 2006), however, I would argue that K'naan's music reveals a blending of old and new forms of authority and political participation. Through the fusion of contemporary hip hop and the massive credibility it claims as both a cultural

and art form, with the long standing authority Somali poetry offers to gifted poets, K'naan expertly carves out socially and symbolically legitimized criticisms of the violence in Somalia and through it contributes to the ongoing debates about what is inherently Somali in its transnational community.

## 8. Conclusions

Since I started working with Somalis, now ten years ago and started doing research among them almost seven years ago, I have watched with sadness news about the escalation of violence and greed in Somalia. I read about Somalis being burned to death and otherwise harassed in South Africa, and am disappointed when I read about the stories of young boys living in the US and other places who have been brain-washed by manipulative international game-players to fight a battle that is not even theirs to fight. I get secret joy out of stories involving stubborn cashiers, pork products, and Target. I laugh when I hear about the “fish n chips” Somalis in England and the Scottish Somali comedy troop. Globally, Somalis are figuring out, defining, and protecting what it means to be morally Somali. They are doing it in innovative and creative ways in some places, difficult ways in others, and violent ways in still others. I believe that the new Somali transnational world is a moral one. Because it is a moral world they are struggling to fix, it will not be an easy fix. Morality is, after all, located at the little spot where individual self meets the social, ideological, cosmological, economic, political, and powerful. As such, part of morality and moral worlds are always and inherently personal and constructed though imaginatively cohesive.

In this dissertation, I have argued that to understand the Somali community living in Eastleigh, one needs to unpack the various ways people are individually and socially constructing the ethical and the moral because when the civil war started, their senses of right and wrong in the world came tumbling down. These new studies of morality in

anthropology are interested in looking at ethics in more than simply a top-down normative approach, which assumes that the moral and the social are synonyms and simultaneously everything and nothing can be considered moral. They are also interested in looking at morality as not entirely subjectively constructed and imagined. Indeed, as individuals are figuring out how to behave or what actions to take, they are braiding together bits of information from the social and ideological worlds with personal interpretations, desires, and goals. And as they engage in this process, both the social and the individual sides of this moral coin also create the other as an object. And vice versa. More clearly put, as one selects aspects of a moral world that one wants to adopt, and one attaches personal meaning to those aspects, in that process of selection and subjective meaning-making, one is also changing the moral world from whence the initial ideal came (as well as the idea itself). This happens because the process of meaning making and coding does not occur in complete isolation, but rather it occurs socially.

Within contexts in which the moral world is actually in a state of disrepair, this back and forth can be even more constructive, creative and imaginative, if also tiring. Mired in a prolonged moment of moral breakdown, Somalis living in Eastleigh are now struggling to redefine and reclaim the moral. If we accept, following Heidegger, that after a moment of breakdown the revision has to be somewhat reflexively different, then we can only assume that the Somali moral world created in Eastleigh and mapped out globally is also somewhat changed. Indeed, as my dissertation has hopefully shown, this is the case.

For Somalis, moral worlds are inextricably linked to Islamic faith and religion. Truly realized moral personhood can only happen in conjunction with a functional pious

and virtuous self. And a pious, virtuous Somali is one who has a heavy or full iman. And as most of the people I talked to believe, functional moral worlds can only exist when the members are moral persons.

For the Somalis I have worked with in Eastleigh, I saw a very obvious point of intersection among faith, morality and mental health. This is in no small part due to the way iman, or faith, is achieved, for as I showed throughout this dissertation, iman is less about a passive belief (although certainly that is a component) and more about the daily activities or virtue and piety undertaken by individuals to ensure that it remains (or gets) full. With a full iman, individuals are less likely to suffer from various spiritual and mental disorders that one might expect a post-war community to be dealing with.

This focus on the intersection among morality, faith, and mental health also allowed for a deeper understanding of the ways people have managed and dealt with certain aspects of social change. Specifically, it is relevant to the shift from Sufism to Salafism (Aqwaanis) in Somali society. The Aqwaani criticism of Sufi practices was, most closely, linked to their practice of dhikri, their interactions with the jinn, and certain funeral rites. Likewise, the focus on morality, mental health and faith allowed for an understanding of how the journey experience was remembered and moralized so that it could be made usable in individual self-narratives.

Through the dissertation, I was also heavily influenced by the Aristotelian idea of the interconnectedness among phronesis (moral judgment), poiesis (creativity/poetics), and praxis. For in each of the sites of moral judgment and morality that I discussed there were aspects of creativity and rationality behind them. Likewise, in my discussion of

poetics, for instance, we can see how creative genres, namely the poems and songs, are also sites for moral judgment and rational expression.

All of this work is done, I argue, within the process of reconstructing a Somali moral world. By mapping the Somali world, and specifically by mapping Eastleigh at the moral center, Somalis are making sense of their lives outside Somalia and they are creating meaning from being scattered around the world. There is not the same kind of monolithic nostalgia that is often written about in other studies of Diasporas; as I have shown, many of the people I worked with and talked to actually narrativized Somalia as an immoral space. By including the entire Somali world on this moral map, then, also allows people from dibadka countries to participate in the moral-making process.

Indeed young Somalis worldwide have been using various medias and modes as vehicles for moral world participation. On internet networking sites, for example, I have observed that Somali women are participating with great vigor in discussions about moral specifically female personhood. Interestingly, in suddenly participating in this process, young women are redefining Somali womanhood in terms of newer or more liberal ideals of womanhood per se. Rather, they are, much like what Mahmood (2005) observed, regulating and defining themselves to newer ideals of highly conservative Muslim norms and ethical practices. Elsewhere, in the UK, Somali young men have been joining and starting comedy troops and online Somali spoof websites where they can tease the stereotypes of Somali youth and in effect create alternatives to them.



## Epilogue: Facebook Fatwas

On April 5, my friend Hamdi<sup>185</sup> posted “Piety signifies purity of soul as well as righteous physical appearance” on her Facebook page. While other “friends” of mine delight in sharing banal (and often far too personal) details of their lives on Facebook, Hamdi’s page is almost exclusively devoted to statements and instructions about her faith, proper behavior and morality. Hamdi is a 21-year old Somali woman who was a dear friend of mine and a key informant. Like Hamdi, Somalis around the world seem to be paying close attention to morality and piety both in online community forums as well as in everyday interactions and settings. In this section, I will show how one young Somali woman, Hamdi, is participating in this moral-making project in one specific context: on Facebook. I argue that by issuing these “fatwa” and participating in this dialogue, she is not only realizing her own moral subjectivity, but she is also contributing to a broader exercise of re-constructing Somali definitions of the moral. While there are various conditions and circumstances that have changed Somali culture and society and opened space for women to participate in broad discourses about Somalia, Somaliness, and Islam, here I will look at how the internet has provided yet another avenue of access to Somali women. Of course, I am using “fatwa” in a casual, light way. In its more traditional and legal sense, fatwa are, for Sunni Muslims, religious opinions concerning Islamic law. They can concern political or social issues as well as religious ones. While gender is not the only thing discussed by people online, I will focus in this article how

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<sup>185</sup> All the names of people are pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the people with whom I worked

proper womanhood (a distinctly moral category for Somalis) is being debated, defined, and made both virtually and literally.

Specifically, I will be looking at how one young Somali woman from Eastleigh is simultaneously performing (and proving) her moral personhood online and how these actions are contributing to larger discussions about Somali moral personhood. Although I have yet to explore in depth what it means to her (or Somalis more generally) to have this medium of expression, discussions I have observed in various online forums mirror the debates I have listened to (and occasionally been forced to participate in) on the ground in Eastleigh. By paying attention to the ways Hamdi's moral subjectivity is realized through her participation in online discussions of Somali moral behavior, we can observe the relationship between the embodied, sensorial mediation of religion and morality as well as the discursive, rational side.

In the literature about new media, there has existed a tension between the idea that new media technologies like the internet are democratizing the public sphere and the idea that new media are actually creating new ways of constraining or regulating people's behavior. In the case I will be presenting, I believe that by looking at how people are participating in discussions about Somali moral womanhood, we can observe that internet (and cell phone) technologies have created space within which people (here, young women) are newly able to contribute to dialogues about proper personhood and in doing so, they are creating a world that is increasingly regulated and moralistic.

Talal Asad (1986), now several decades ago, thoughtfully challenged scholars of Islam and Muslim societies to recognize the plurality of the Muslim world and insisted that scholars of Islam need to "seek to understand the historical conditions that enable the

production and maintenance of specific discursive traditions, or their transformation – and the efforts of practitioners to achieve coherence” (1986:17). He maintained that Islam should be approached anthropologically as a discursive tradition that connects individuals to groups to ideologies and so on.

Likewise, it has been well documented that the Muslim Public Sphere, not unlike the public sphere more broadly, is created through public debates about authenticity, proper behavior and interpretation. Eickelman and Anderson have argued that “Muslim politics is less an expression of a unitary voice...than an engagement to argue about correct interpretations.” Likewise, in her work with the Diasporic public sphere of Pakistanis in Britain, Pnina Werbner states that it is both an arena of argument and of imaginative creativity.

Morality and religion for Somalis is mediated through discourse and performance. It is creative and rational. For Somalis, morality is about self-regulation, proselytization, discipline, femininity/masculinity and piety and also about nation, family and personhood. Making the moral world is about the dialogue between positioning and subjectivity.

Media studies scholars have been concerned with these issues for many years. In some media studies, there has been concern over the role of technology, particularly these new media technologies in blurring a person’s awareness of the meditative process. Indeed, I believe one of the reasons the internet has been so popular and meaningful for Somalis is due to the fact that there is an illusion of immediacy. The mediation process is disguised here so that participating in this virtual dialogue about Somali moral

personhood feels like it is occurring in real time. It can, therefore, feel like a much more real, authentic, ethical task.

Media studies scholars have also broadly been interested in the tension between new media technologies as democratizing the public sphere, whereby new actors have access to public dialogues. Indeed, in many ways, I would argue that these new media technologies are and have opened new venues for public sphere participation to people who otherwise would be excluded. However, I don't believe that these new media are the only ways of accessing or participating in the public sphere. Further, in addressing the flip side of this popular debate in media studies and the anthropology of media, I also believe that these new media technologies are facilitating new means of social and individual regulation and discipline. Indeed in the Somali case, I believe that with new access to these new media, many individuals are actually actively redefining and reconstructing norms so that definitions of good and bad, and right and wrong are actually becoming narrower and more rigid.

Historically, formal political and social commentary was largely the domain of older men. While certainly women contributed dramatically to determinations of good and proper womanhood, personhood, and behavior, men possessed the formal authority to create definitions (see Barnes and Boddy 1996; Kapteijns 1997; Lewis 1999). Further, according to most of the elderly women I interviewed in Eastleigh, Somali women did not have equal access to Qur'anic schooling as men when they were growing up in Somalia. While Siyaad Barre passed laws in the 1970s that gave women certain access to property and personal rights, women remained largely excluded from the public sphere up until the civil war in 1991. During the civil war and subsequent flight, women were

frequently highly vulnerable for their position in the clan-structure. Due to the patrilineal clan-exogamous marital and patrilocal residence patterns, most Somali women found themselves occupying dual clan identities when the war began: the clan of their husband and the clan of their father. Depending on the clans represented in this dual identity, the woman could potentially find herself in the gray area between two warring clans.

Once in exile, however, many women began to find that by occupying this gray area they were structurally allowed a certain amount of wiggle room. While the men were obligated to their families (Farrah 2003) during this time when clan family lines were reified and made supremely rigid, women did not bear the same responsibility. Women in Eastleigh are able to circumvent the rigid clan lines to work, live and socialize. Moreover, since the collapse of the Somali state and the subsequent flight into exile, many women have become widows, divorcees or simply abandoned by their husbands who, according to these women, could not handle the stress of life in the family. Women are increasingly relying on close uterine ties and groups for support and companionship. Outside the home, Somali women are also gaining access to some formal political venues. When the transitional parliament was elected in 2000, it was decided that in addition to each of the 5 major clan families having seats, Somali women, dubbed the 6<sup>th</sup> clan family, were also slotted to have 12% of the parliamentary positions. This movement was spearheaded by Somali human rights and political activist, Asha Haji Elmi.

Within this context of war and displacement, and with the ever-increasing influence of new schools of Islam coming from the Middle East and Central Asia (particularly Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Pakistan), women are also finding new avenues of access to more formal means of public criticism and analysis. Women are equally as

encouraged to seek out religious education as men and with this new knowledge they are effecting broad social changes such as promoting an end to the traditional practice of female genital cutting. As these religious movements coming out of the Middle East are framed in global and modern ways, young women in particular are shifting their practices and beliefs to more conservative paths over time. Just during the time I spent in Kenya between 2005-2008, definitions of and stories about good womanhood and good women changed drastically to favor much more Islamist ideals. Within this broad context of social and structural change for women, specifically female moral personhood is a growing social concern.

*Facebook and the Virtual Data:*

Although there are numerous dialogues about Somali moral personhood online<sup>186</sup>, for the purpose of this epilogue, I will be limiting my discussion to one friend's Facebook account posts. My friend, Hamdi, spends a great deal of time online making statements about proper behavior and personhood. Most of the Facebook "groups" she is a part of or people/pages she is a "fan" of have something to do with her faith. I believe that Facebook and other Internet web-based forums are providing individual Somalis around the world space to participate in this creative and rational project of moral world reconstruction during an extended moment of moral breakdown and conflict. Furthermore, I believe that through their participation in these electronic communities, specifically as they issue their own "fatwas" and/or comment on others,' people like Hamdi are establishing their own moral subjectivities. I believe this is possible particularly because of the Somali conception of *iman* as an ongoing project requiring

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<sup>186</sup> And multiple videos and examples of Somali girls and women in the abroad who have "gone bad."

constant ethical work and because of the Somali belief that helping others find their faiths or to become better Muslims is their fundamental and ethical responsibility<sup>187</sup>.

Importantly, this moral status achieved and definitions of the moral created through virtual community participation actually extends to life offline (even when and though participants may actually live around the world).

In this section I will discuss three different “streams” surrounding a “fatwa” Hamdi posted online. The first conversation I will discuss starts with a broad statement Hamdi made about piety, moral behavior and triviality of life on earth.

“IT IS TIME TO WAKE UP!”

All of you are taking life as joke and thinking that whatever you are caught up in now is gonna last. What surprises me the most is all of us know the rules of our religion and yet we pretend to be ignorant, so as to fulfill our desires and all for what at the cost of being popular or to look so cool. That’s just deceiving yourself and honestly speaking its not worth it at all then after a while you will see the person regretting. Why regret when you know that you can make a decision which is not gonna affect you in a negative way. Why do something which you know it’s not right and when told about it that it is wrong and it’s a sin, you tell the person to shut up or just take it as a joke. Don’t you know that there is no such thing as joking when it comes to matters which concern the *deen*<sup>188</sup>? Why is it that one tries so hard in being popular or to fit in but doesn’t try to work hard for the Hereafter? Why are we not taking things seriously? *Subhanallah*<sup>189</sup> the signs are there and yet we all pretend to be blind. When one turns to Allah and focuses more at the *deen* side and does their best in doing good as to please Allah, their heart will be at ease, their not bothered or worried about the pleasure of this world. Their main focus is the Hereafter which most of us are forgetting about. Just take a minute and think about how things are in your life? Ask yourself if the things your doing if it’s pleasing Allah or not? Take a look around you and you

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<sup>187</sup> Converting (or as they say: reverting) someone to Islam will bring someone to heaven – a kind of free pass

<sup>188</sup> *Deen*: (Somali: *diin*, Arabic: *Dīn*) religion

<sup>189</sup> *Subhan’Allah*: Glorious is Allah

will see *fitna*<sup>190</sup> increasing. Have you asked yourself what the reason might be? Ask yourself what makes it so hard for one to repent or what makes them say will do it soon *inshallah*? It's about time we all make a change and focus on the Hereafter.

*Comments:*

- Hamdi: Your very welcome siz and thanks for reading it.  
 Man 1: [Hamdi] congrats u made me sato. That a wonderful note n ave learnt a lot.  
 H: *Shukran* bro.  
 Man 2: *Mashallah* what a nice advice from a sister. An advice like this is worth all the gold and diamond of the world. People these days are following their own desires and run after *dunia*<sup>191</sup>. You're very right sister, these things will one day vanish and perish. The only thing that will remain is your deeds. Starting with myself and telling every Muslim. Read More, we should try and strive to become better Muslims *inshallah*. A brilliant advice from a brilliant sister. The one who'll marry you is a very lucky man. : )  
 Man 3: Thanks siz 4 dis note.2 paraphrase it ol, *dunia* aint 4 us @ ol.. yap we r nthn bt pencils in da eyez of ALLAH(S.W.T). N da best of frenz amng us, iz da 1 who reminds u abt ua deen.. shukran [Hamdi].  
 H: *Jazakallah Kheyran*<sup>192</sup> to all of you for taking the time to read it and for your comments. Thanks [Man 2]. You're right. [Man3] we should all strive to become better Muslims *inshallah* and we should start now, not tomorrow, not later. This *dunya* is nothing compared to the one that is waiting for us. I pray to Allah that He guides all of us to the right path and lets all make a change. You're right bro indeed his a lucky man *inshallah*. :-)

If we return to my earlier point that discourse forms subjects and subject positions, and that like other public spheres, the moral world is a space in which realized

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<sup>190</sup> *Fitna*: schism, upheaval, anarchy

<sup>191</sup> *Dunia/dunya*: world (Somali)

<sup>192</sup> If properly spelled, this would be *Jazakallahu Khayran*, (Arabic) which means "May Allah reward you for your good." It is a very elaborate and religious way of saying thanks.



individuals debate and contest what it means to be moral, then we can understand the above dialogue as one that is simultaneously allowing Hamdi to realize her own moral subjectivity *and* is contributing to the discursive construction of the Somali moral world. To illustrate this, let's first turn to Hamdi's original statement, "It is Time to Wake Up." In the statement, Hamdi admonishes the people who are straying from the faith, or from their responsibilities as good Muslims. She criticizes her audience/readers for prioritizing the trivialities of life on earth, rather than focusing on behavior that will bring them into heaven (Janna) and the "hereafter." Although Hamdi does not speak Arabic, her use of Arabic words at specific moments lends credibility and authority to her "fatwa". It is the dialogue that this statement sparks that is particularly interesting however. In the discussion following the original note, Hamdi becomes righteous, a valuable woman and sister, a teacher and motivator, and religious advisor. Moreover, by dialoguing about Hamdi's statement, the five people involved (or alluded to) in the conversation are collectively deciding what is suggested moral behavior for all Somalis (or Muslims) and are also performing their own morality.

Again, I use the word "moral" here instead of "Somali" or "religious" because even in this discussion good and bad were not limited to issues related to Islam or to culture. Issues pertaining to popularity, to marriage, to womanhood, to sisterhood, to community, to education in addition to faith were raised and discussed in the course of this conversation.

The next two/three dialogues are more specifically about the role and responsibilities of the wife in Somali relationships. In each conversation, the woman's role is carefully defined according to her relationships with, treatment of, and deference

to men (or in the final case, briefly, to her mother). What is particularly salient in observing each of these conversations is how they reveal new definitions of Somali womanhood that are drastically different from definitions and beliefs about good womanhood even three years ago. Indeed, if one compares these statements about good womanhood with those definitions and descriptions given to me during interviews in 2005 and 2006, there has been a drastic change.

In this first dialogue, it is the conversation with Man1 embedded in the stream that is important to the discussion about the moral community. (The rest of the conversation is a series of jokes about friends waking each other up with late night phone calls and statements about how Hamdi had intended on closing her facebook account.) Note the way they both (Hamdi and Man1) condemn female independence as a sign of disobedience to their husbands. This is interesting in that it reveals the very tension present in discussions about the media and the public sphere. Hamdi is benefiting from the relative democratization of the public sphere through the internet but using this new space to criticize women and women's independence.

“Obedience to the husband is a vital constituent of the Muslim Woman’s Taqwa (Piety), she can never be pious if she lacks the treasure of obedience.”

Female 1: Very true, siz. *Habari ya asubuhi*<sup>193</sup>?

Female 2: true words *walaal*<sup>194</sup>.

Insha'allah you are well? And your family too?

H: Thnks my sisters..Mzuri n woman u gotta stop calling me when am asleep. Unanikatsia ndoto! :-) How u doing? Am doing well [x] so as the family. Hope ur doing good.

Male 1 Tell 'em shawty<sup>195</sup>!

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<sup>193</sup> *Habari ya Asubuhi*: (Swahili) How are you this morning?

<sup>194</sup> *Walaal*: sister or brother in Somali

- H: Well [male 1] that doesn't mean the husband takes advantage of the wife as he pleases!
- F1: Hahahaa Hamdi mabore kwa fb. Am doing fine swty.
- H: Lol! U knw nakubenda kama baibai :-)
- M1: Of course the man he has to be humane... But some women think that jst coz they are independent they can jst do nything they please nd tha husband is irrelevant.
- H: Well such women r deceiving themselves, being independent is not gonna take them *2jannah*<sup>196</sup> but obeying her husband will.

April 5.

"A woman who asks her husband for divorce without a valid reason – on her fragrance of Jannah is unlawful" - Prophet Muhamad (SAW)

- Woman 1: Reallllyyyy? Just kidding lol. Ye true that.
- Hamdi: *Wad walantahay!* :-). So dear, u know what to do nw n I pray ol will be *kheyr*<sup>197</sup> for the both u n paradise lies under his feet..
- W1: loool, yes am crazy I find it hard to accept that my Jannat lies in his feet. (just my craziness) no seriously I know my jannat was once under my Mother's feet & now it shift to my husband. Thanx hun
- H: Yes dear, seriously when a lady is married her paradise lies under the feet of her husband. Ur welcome *macaanto*. There is a note I wrote about the pious woman or wife, u go through it n u will get to know all about it in details.

"The Pious Muslim Wife" [The note to which Hamdi was referring in previous chat]

The prophet S.A.W said:

"The best of gudness 4 a man after *Taqwa*<sup>198</sup> is a pious wife. If he luks @her, sh mkes hm hapi. If he takes an oath vouchn 4hr, sh upholds hm n wn he s away frm her sh guards herself n hs belongings. "da entire wrld s a temporary benefi n da best benefits s a pious wife". Da best treasures s a pious wife. Da piety n value of a muslim woman r nt gauged in terms of supererogatory acts of *ibada*<sup>199</sup>. In additn 2general acts of piety n worship a woman's rank n piety r increasd by hr obdience 2hr husband."

<sup>195</sup> Note also the use of various linguistic codes and registers. This can point to the processes young people undertake to reconcile the various linguistic, cultural and social values and pluralisms relevant to young Somalis globally.

<sup>196</sup> Jannat: Heaven (Arabic)

<sup>197</sup> Kheyr (Arabic): good

<sup>198</sup> Taqwa: (Arabic) God-consciousness

<sup>199</sup> Ibada: (Arabic) Service to God through observance of the pillars of Islam

Man 1: thats true infact ave seen 2 different kind of wifes now I came 2 realize wot u sayin

H: Yah thyr r doz hu complain, wine n r rude 2thyr husbands n doz r da ones hu dn prospr hia n da hereafter. Paradise lies unda da feet of da husband!

M1: thnx u ryt again

M1: I had that wot hindu women does they knw hw to treat thea husbands well

H: Yah thy do n if only thy wa muslims thy wd truly succeed bt also muslim women do thyr best bt only a few, may Allah reward thm.

M1: yap may Allah reward them

F1: Amiin! True [Hamdi], walahi dunioa ya sasa utapata wachache wanaoheshimu waume zao na kuwatii.. Paradise lies under his feet once ukishaolewa..Unafaa kumtunza na kumheshimu..mwanamke kuingia Jannah si ngumu bali wao ndo wanaifanya jukumu ngumu..thanx abayo for this information..May Allah guide us all! Amiin.

H: Amiin siz n thnkx 4readn

F2: Wat! Paradise lies unda da feet of da husband? Av neva heard dat siz. Its ur mother nt ur hubby. &Amin malyun, unakaa unaelewa hio mambo dadangu. Ushanitpata? Jutayarishe imam b ur apprentice, Pwity soon inshALLAH. Lol!

H: [x], I min a woman huz marryd as 4hr paradise lies unda da feet of hr hubby! Da prophet s.a.w. Said if a woman died n hr was pleasd wt hr goes 2Jannah. As 4nw in our cases paradise lies unda da feet of our lvly mothrs.

F2: Ooh! Point jolted dwn yauqti, bt wat if he pisses me off n I die (btw am serious)? As in he displeases me, then wat?

H: We'r tld u shd neva frown in hs presnc evn if u dn lyk wteva he myt hv sd o brot u.As 4da pisd u shdn b,u shd b patient, tolerant n undastnd n evn if ur nt at fault u apologies. *Mtume*<sup>200</sup> s.a.w said da women tat r mst in da jahannam r doz hu curse in abundnce n r ungr8ful 2thy husbnds. Dspleasd wt u thn ur denied da fragrnc of jannah.

In conversations I had with Hamdi and others about these posts, I was particularly interested in whether these “fatwas” and the discussions about them had any real effect how people acted and behaved offline. Hamdi and the others all assured me that it did. Hamdi also told me that venues like Facebook, and posting as such on it, reaffirmed her own sense of personhood as a good Muslim and a good Somali.

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<sup>200</sup> Mtume: (Swahili) Messenger

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